The Miracles of Clara Van Haag

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THE MIRACLES OF CLARA VAN HAAG

I

HEDVIG appeared on the stone steps of the Toldbod, her yellow hair fluttering in the spring breeze. She drew it aside from her forehead, shaded her eyes with one hand, and looked up along Brogade. The carriage must soon be there. Then, running down the three steps, she came to a standstill in the middle of the road. She stood easily upright on her feet, while the wind from the harbour blew her skirts in about her legs and spread her white apron out like a glittering lateen sail.

The office window opened cautiously a little way, and Old Poulsen's gentle, grey, billy-goat face peeped out. Hedvig laughed up at him :

" No, not yet ! "

She went up into the office.

" Lovely and warm in here," she said, stroking her bare arms from the elbow in turn. The fire was fluttering softly in the stove, the sun shone in through the two windows, painting splendidly brilliant squares on the shiny linoleum. Outside, along the quay, were ships with white deck-houses and tall masts.

Poulsen walked up and down restlessly in his down-trodden shoes. He was wearing the same old green uniform coat as ever, faded to yellow on the right-hand side, but Hedvig noticed he had put on a pair of cuffs—strangely shaped cuffs that he was constantly screwing up into his sleeves. Suddenly he stopped, and stood listening with open mouth. He drew himself up two or three times, but his chronic stoop was not to be straightened out in a moment ; at last he twirled round helplessly where he stood.

" Wasn't that a carriage coming ? " he said.

Hedvig sprang to the door, ran down into the street and back again.

" Never a sign of one ! "

" It sounded like . . . it really sounded like a carriage," murmured Poulsen apologetically, and fell to pacing up and down once more.

Hedvig stepped up right in front of him, barring his way.

" Poulsen ! What's the matter with you to-day ? Anyone'd think it was *your* mistress coming, instead of mine."

Poulsen, abashed, glanced aside uneasily, and stammered :

" I—I don't mind telling you, Hedvig, I'd rather thought of—thought of just stepping out to say '*Goddag*'—or perhaps—er—' Welcome to Knarreby,' you know, or—or . . ."

" Well, and what then ? It's nothing to be frightened about."

" Ah, but you see, my dear, I'm not sure—I can't be quite sure if it's the right thing to do, you know. The office, that's one thing, but the house . . . You see what I mean ? My place is down here, and nothing

to do with upstairs. And I wouldn't dream of putting myself forward in any way. But, seeing I've been here now these two-and-twenty years, I can't help feeling I've a sort of right to just step out and say '*Goddag*,' and 'Welcome to Knarreby Toldbod.'" [1]

"And so you have, I'm sure."

"I have, you know, really," repeated Poulsen more cheerfully. "But—what's the best way . . .? Do you think, now, if I put on my cap, and went out on the steps, just to make it more official like, or . . . well, I'm getting on, you know, but this is the first—the very first time in all my life there's come a new mistress to the Toldbod here. Wassermann and his wife, they weren't young when I first came. But this one, she comes out here from Heaven knows where in the wide world. Only the other day, Hr. van Haag was saying something about 'when we were in Paris . . .' *In Paris!* Why, it takes your breath away to think of it. What do you say?"

Hedvig looked thoughtful. "It's awkward for us, anyhow. *We* don't know if she's young or old, if she's an angel or a very devil. She's more likely to be that, I should say. But . . ."—and Hedvig flung back her shoulders as if casting off a cloak of superfluous considerations—"anyhow, *I'm* not going to go on my knees to her, if she's a dozen times the mistress. If she comes telling me '*I'm from Paris*,' I shall simply say: '*Oh, are you? And I'm from Knarreby!*' And that'll be *q-u-i-t quits*!"

"Ah, it's all very well for you," said aged Poulsen, shaking his head and sitting down heavily in his chair by the window. He took up his pen, as if to intimate that the discussion was at an end, but a moment later

[1] *Toldbod:* the Custom House. "Toll-booth."

they were talking again of the same remarkable topic, to wit, that Toldforvalter van Haag, who had been living as a bachelor now for nearly a year, had got that telegram yesterday, and Hedvig had been down to Søren Vognmand to order a closed carriage to meet the three o'clock train. *Fruen* . . .[1] Poulsen's back curved every time he spoke the word.

" Yes," said Hedvig. " But I can't stand her being so sharp with her maids, for instance. You'd never think a woman with any education would use such language at all."

" What—what do you mean? How do you know . . . ? "

Hedvig looked stiffly in front of her, and said mysteriously :

" That's what she's like, I know. I don't mean, of course, I know exactly the very words. But when Hr. van Haag daren't even put his own furniture as he likes . . . He always says ' Leave it where it is till mistress comes, she'll be sure to move it anyhow ! ' So she must be a troublesome one, and then, of course, she'll be nasty to me as well. See ? "

Poulsen made no attempt to follow Hedvig's logic, but went to the window and opened it in his timidly careful way. And as the fresh air poured in, both heard at once distinctly the rumble of wheels from Algade.

The window was closed with most incautious haste. Hedvig's cheeks flushed ; Poulsen ran to the row of pegs and took down his gold-laced cap, put it on, took it off again, and ended by setting it hopelessly awry

[1] *Fruen :* "the mistress." The word is also generally used in speaking of a married lady without mentioning her name. Fru Clara Van Haag is frequently referred to as "Fruen" throughout the book.

on his grey head. When the carriage rolled up, he and Hedvig were standing like two highly dissimilar statues, one on either side of the top step.

Søren Vognmand gave a mighty crack of his whip, and pulled up the horses. The hood was down. Beside Hr. van Haag in the carriage sat a straight, slender woman in white.

" Drive on a little, if you please."

The lady's voice gave each word its proper share of emphasis. Søren Vognmand turned his head, to make sure the door of the carriage was where he had reckoned it should be—midway in front of the steps, exactly. Then he swung his nose round to the front once more.

" Drive on a little, please ! As far as the ship there."

Søren gave an appealing glance at Hr. van Haag—he at any rate was none of your womenfolk—but, finding no help in that quarter, he lashed out at the near side horse in a way that made the carriage almost leap the twenty odd yards across to the quay. Never in his born days had he heard of such a thing.

" Right. Now round, if you please. Thanks. No, stay where you are a minute ! "

Then happened something altogether notable and hitherto unheard of—something that was whispered of years afterwards in tones of mystery throughout the town : Fruen drew forth from a white silk bag a pair of opera-glasses, a perfect little jewel of a thing, all glittering and splendid, and held it to her eyes.

The stevedores hauling planks ashore from the craft nearest at hand stopped their work in amazement. Madam Hermansen, waddling resignedly along with her greengrocer's barrow behind her, stopped dead, and wrinkled her beetroot countenance to a sort of smile.

Hehe ! Here was something happening in Knarreby for once !

The glasses were plainly directed towards the Toldbod itself. Fru van Haag sat scrutinising the heavy, yellow-ochre building as if it were some significant point on her course, and she a distant ship. Suddenly she ordered the carriage on again, in front of Vang's hotel, and put up her glasses again, gazing as if with increasing suspicion at her future home.

The two poor creatures waiting on the steps felt her magnifying glance upon themselves. Hedvig's blue eyes set sharply, and the blood came and went in her cheeks. Old Poulsen screwed at his refractory cuffs, glancing uneasily all ways at his dress, in dread lest Fruen should be even then discovering something amiss.

At last she seemed to have come to a decision. Lowering her glasses, she signed with her gloved hand to the humiliated Søren to drive up to the house. Hedvig opened the carriage door. Toldforvalter van Haag stepped out, followed by his wife, a slender figure fully as tall as his own.

Poulsen plucked off his cap and, holding it at his side, commenced in his decrepit voice :

" As the oldest official in the service of His Majesty's Customs at Knarreby, I trust I may claim the right . . ."

The rest of Poulsen's speech was lost to the world for ever. His toothless words lacked power to grip the ear, and after a second or so he was bankrupt of sound.

There was something wanting in Fru van Haag's manner to make her appear a thorough lady—according to Knarreby standards. She lacked the stiffness and reserve that is considered fitting on first arrival at a place. See there, for instance, how easily and at home

she stood on the steps, and took possession of Hedvig with the most casual air. "*Goddag*, Hedvig. Just carry these things up, would you ? Thanks."

Well, well, perhaps her husband had told her as they drove up : that's Hedvig, your maid, on the steps there. Yes, of course, he must have. Still, she might have pretended not to know. And the same with Poulsen ; she ought to have waited for him to be presented. Instead of which, this is what she did : Walked straight up to him, threw him into utter confusion at the start by offering him her left hand, which he fumbled at desperately with his right, and said out loud, as if continuing a conversation :

"Not half bad-looking really, if only they hadn't painted it the colour of I won't say what ! "

She was presumably referring to the building, but Poulsen's faded old eyes flickered hither and thither, as if he fancied she must be speaking of his coat.

Madam Hermansen set up a laugh that echoed between the house and Vang's hotel.

Fruen walked with a firm, light step up to the living-rooms above. Her husband gave a twitch at his new trousers, creased to a knife-edge down the leg, and creaked up after her. Last of all came Hedvig, taking in everything with all her senses. That silk bag with the glasses, and even the parasol, had a delicate, strange perfume about them.

Just inside the drawing-room door her mistress stopped, and Hedvig noted that she showed no delight of recognition over the furniture.

"Er—I left things so that you could fix them up as you liked," said Hr. van Haag.

"Oh yes, thanks," said his wife absently, and sat down in the nearest chair. Her voice and bearing

seemed suddenly to have lost all life and elasticity. Her head drooped forward, her mouth a trifle open, her eyes looking nowhere.

"Lunch is ready," said Hedvig, as she went out. But, coming in again a little later, she found her mistress sitting as before. Then she rose, submitted listlessly as Hedvig drew off her white coat, and went in to table.

Her husband bade her welcome as they sat down. Hedvig noticed that his voice was no more expressive than if he had been asking for his boots.

They spoke little during the first part of the meal, but the wine sank rapidly in the bottle. Hr. van Haag's cheeks flushed in red spots, but his wife sat pale as ever. Properly speaking, she was not pale at all; there was a curious golden hue in her complexion. Hedvig caught a word or two as she poured out the coffee:

"The same old things? Of course," said Hr. van Haag. "Did you expect me to buy a whole houseful of furniture here and leave all the old things at Helsingør?"

"The *air* of the place is just the same. I can't stand it. Wretchedly bad taste on my part, no doubt. But I do wish you'd left the air behind."

Her husband poured out a glass of wine and drank it off before answering.

"It seems to me—when you wrap yourself up in your own perfume—you still use the same, I notice—the air of the rooms can't hurt you very much."

"I dare say it's funny, but I can't help it. It *is* so, and it always will be!"

Hedvig was out in her kitchen once more. She stood for a long time idly, thinking of the curious way her mistress had spoken about the air of the place. Now

what could it mean? Hedvig drummed with her fingers on her front teeth, as was her way when puzzling over things. Suddenly the dining-room bell rang. And it went on and on while she was wiping her hands and hurrying through the little passage. But, heavens!—what was this? A half-smothered cry, and the bell stopped. Hedvig flung open the door in time to see Hr. van Haag draw himself up hastily and step aside from where his wife sat. She saw her mistress's white arm, bare to the elbow, waving this way and that with the torn bell-rope in her clenched hand. And what more? She saw her mistress wipe her mouth, spit out something into her serviette, and wipe her lips again as if she had tasted something poisonous.

But Hr. van Haag turned on his heel and said in his dullest, everyday voice:

"You can clear away—that's all."

"Yes . . ." said Hedvig in confusion. She did not venture to look at either of the pair, but began at hazard moving the things nearest to hand.

Fruen rose, threw down her serviette slap on the floor, and went into the adjoining room, breathing as if she had been running full tilt upstairs.

Hr. van Haag took another glass of wine, and said:

"My wife wishes her trunks brought up."

"Yes."

But here Fru van Haag herself appeared in the doorway, and said, with an air of authority that made all other orders simply null:

"*My trunks will stay where they are!* And, Hedvig, you can go and order a carriage at once, if you please."

"There's no train now," said her husband. But this

time his voice was not by any means as if asking for his boots. He tried to squeeze out a little whinnying laugh.

" At once ! " said Fru van Haag.

" Yes."

At this her husband could contain himself no longer ; he whinnied again, and said :

" Allow me. *I* shall be most happy to order a carriage myself. Most happy, I assure you."

" Thank you."

The door slammed behind him.

There was a pause. Then Fruen turned to Hedvig with a little laugh. " Well, my dear," she said, " there'll be no *Frue* in the house here, after all. We've not had much time to get to like each other, have we ? And you, poor thing, you've been having all sorts of extra work, of course, getting in things and doing the place up. Here . . ."—she opened her smooth little purse and took out a ten-*Kroner* note—" that's for you, and thank you for your trouble."

" Oh . . . thank you," said Hedvig, flushing. The note was perfectly new—it looked, indeed, almost too new to be genuine. But of course such a fine lady could never think of touching anything old and dirty.

" And then, dear, I don't want you to say anything about this—this pleasant little banquet of ours—to anyone. You understand ? "

Hedvig was just dropping the note into the breast of her dress ; now she fished it up again in two fingers, and held it out with a shy smile.

" Please, I don't want to be paid for keeping a secret. And besides, you know, I didn't see anything, really."

" Oh, my dear child—how dreadfully tactless of me !

You make me . . . Look here, I'm going away, and it won't matter in the least to me what people here say. But Hr. van Haag, he'll be here all the time. And, you know, I've an idea they'll say it was his fault I went away again, if they hear about it. And that's quite wrong—at least, it's not quite right. It was my fault. My nerves are simply awful. I'm in such a state that the least thing upsets me. It was my fault. But now you must forget all about that stupid money. I'll find some little thing for you in my trunk instead. And you'll keep it, won't you, in memory of a foolish woman that was your mistress for an hour? Will you, Hedvig? Are my things in the passage? "

" I—I brought them up before."

" Up where? "

" In Fruen's room."

" Oh, so I've a room of my own, have I? Good! We'll go in there."

Hedvig opened the door, and explained that the place wasn't in order a bit, but Hr. van Haag had said . . .

It was a bright little sunlit room, with blue walls, one window looking out on to the church, the other over the harbour, and between the two a big black grand piano set at an angle. On the smooth surface of the piano stood a crystal bowl with a single tall branch of fresh green beech.

" Oh, my dear piano! " cried Fruen, running forward as if to an embrace. " It's ages now . . . and I've missed it so! "

And, sitting down on the little round stool, she leaned forward over the instrument with her hands before her face.

" I've been away so long, Hedvig, I'd almost for-

gotten it all. And now, here's my best friend here to receive me—and then to run away again and leave it all alone . . ."

"But—couldn't you take it with you?"

"Haha! No; the piano, that's *his*. Oh, take that branch thing away, will you? What an idea, to put it in here at all!"

Hedvig flushed. "I—it was me," she said. "I kept it in water in the window, till the buds opened. I—I thought it looked so nice. And seeing the rest of the place didn't look nice as it was . . ."

"You, Hedvig? You did that to please me, a stranger? Why . . . I thank you, dear. What a dainty little hand it is. Long fingers—there's race in that hand. And you could play, too. Are you a little countess in disguise? Who is your father, child?"

"His name's Egholm. The photographer."

"Photographer? Is he, though?" said Fruen, still playing with Hedvig's fingers. "And his name's Egholm? Curious old-fashioned name."

Suddenly she dropped the girl's hand, and looked thoughtfully out through the window.

"Hedvig Egholm, did you say? Tell me; your father, is he very old?"

"No . . . not so very old. I don't quite know . . ."

"Oh, but of course, he need not be so very old. Photographer! . . . Tell me, you don't happen to know if he was ever in Helsingør?"

"Yes, he was in a place there once. Some Consul or other. He often talks about it. . . ."

Fru van Haag rose to her feet with some emotion. Threads of her life that had lain hitherto in an unheeded

tangle unravelled now of themselves and met and wove again into a new strange pattern. More than twenty years back this Egholm had been her boy-lover. She had never so much as thought of him since then. And now, after travelling all over the world, she had come, one fine April day, to Knarreby, a place that seemed to lie outside every imaginable world, to find her child-lover actually alive, in the person of a photographer, with a family of his own. There could be no doubt about it ; here was Hedvig, with Kasper Egholm's long-fingered hands. Strange. . . . And those hands had set flowers to greet her. . . .

Less for information than as voicing her thoughts from a trance, she went on :

" You haven't your father's eyes. Nor his hair. Your father's hair is almost black—and brushed back from the forehead ; isn't that right ? "

Hedvig laughed.

" Father hasn't much hair at all now."

Fruen laughed too. Then she fell to examining Hedvig from every side, with the same careful scrutiny as she had the house when she drove up. Hedvig flushed under her glance, but was not displeased. Fruen had such strange big eyes, and the look on her face changed incessantly. Hedvig could not help thinking it was as if she were watching a procession go by ; now nodding to some one she knew, then laughing at some ridiculous figure, then frowning slightly, as at sight of some one she did not like.

Some time passed in silence, then Fru Van Haag said in her fine rich voice :

" I am Consul Steen's daughter. Perhaps you know. Your father and I were playmates in the old days. I simply couldn't go away again now without

seeing him. And, after all, I might just as well stay in Knarreby now I'm here. It won't be so bad as long as I have you."

She opened a trunk, and began lifting and moving delicate things : dresses and linen soft as the petals of flowers. At last she found a flat mahogany box, and took from it a brooch set with a trefoil of amethysts. She handed it to Hedvig with a smile.

" There, put that in your dress, at the neck."

" Thank you," said Hedvig, holding out her hand.

Fruen took it and looked at the fingers again.

" And then," she said, " we must have these ten little fingers trained to what they were meant for. Oh, we shall be three good friends at Knarreby Toldbod—you and I and the piano. And surely that ought to be enough."

Just then came the sound of wheels outside, stopping in front of the house. Hr. van Haag had driven up with it. He had meant what he said, then. Hedvig felt a sudden pang at her heart ; was the Toldbod to be empty as before—a barren warehouse of a place, with a couple of human beings accidentally dropped in ? No ; Fru van Haag opened the window, and gave her order that none failed to obey :

" The carriage can go back again. I am going to stay."

Toldforvalter van Haag repeated the order after his own fashion, as if he were asking for his shaving-water. But it was needless. Søren Vognmand had already turned the horses ; an extra touch of the whip, and their hoofs struck sparks from the cobbled roadway.

And then it was that Fru van Haag said something that filled Hedvig with amazement, more so, perhaps,

than all else that she had heard and seen on this extraordinary day :

" Go down and ask the old man to come up."

" Old man . . . ? "

" Yes, that old man in the faded coat. Tell him I want to hear that speech he was going to make for me."

What it was that moved her Hedvig herself did not know, but she felt the tears welling into her eyes as she ran down the stairs. She burst into the office without knocking, threw both arms round the little withered man at his desk by the window, and said all out of breath :

" Poulsen ! She's the dearest dear on earth, and a queen besides. She's given me this jewel brooch—and now you've got to go up and make your speech. And, Poulsen, she's going to stay ! She's not going, after all. Oh, be quick, Poulsen ! Aren't you ever so pleased now ? "

II

NEXT evening Hedvig went home. Fruen had been out in the kitchen with her all the afternoon, and told her many things about her childhood and girlhood. Now she sent her off home with a cheery message to her father, and a promise to call on him soon.

After all, thought Hedvig, as she turned in to Stationsvej on the way home, it might have come at a worse time. Suppose it had happened in the days when they lived in the back-yard premises of the undertaker's shop, and the camera stood on a cement barrel with a green cloth over. Hedvig shuddered at the thought of that comfortless time. No, the little white house her father had built now was a very different thing. She was just coming in sight of it now. And it really did look both cheerful and elegant, with the creeper and honeysuckle growing half-way up the roof.

Hedvig knew well enough that things within doors were hardly as cheerful or as elegant—ugh ! But now she would help her mother as well as she could, and it would not look so bad. There were brass handles to the doors ; they should be polished like purest gold for Fruen's hand to touch.

There was light already burning behind the small panes—that must be father at work. What sort of temper was he in to-day, she wondered ?

She stepped over the bridge across the ditch and

opened the door. A harsh and vulgar door-bell clattered as she did so. "It's me," said Hedvig, and passed through the "waiting-room"—it really seemed to her quite splendidly furnished, though the upholstery was not a little damaged—into the next room, which was parlour and workroom in one.

A single glance showed her that something unusual was going on.

Her father stood at his table, trimming the edges of some prints. He stood in the light of the small lamp, darkening the rest of the room, but there on the settee was Sivert, her eldest brother, apprenticed to a glazier in the town. Close beside him was little Emanuel, and both were rocking to and fro in a noiseless ecstasy of laughter behind their father's back. There was nothing remarkable in Sivert's laughing; it would rather have seemed strange if he had not. But how on earth had it come about that he should be sitting in here at his ease on the settee, with his father humming carelessly all the time as if it were nothing? And now, lo, father turned and nodded his big shiny pate: *Godaften!* He, too, was evidently pleased about something. A mystery, indeed!

"Is mother outside?" said Hedvig, going through to the kitchen.

Her mother was there. At sight of Hedvig she set down the things she was holding, and hurried to embrace her.

"And so you've got an evening off already? I didn't look to see you the first week. Well, and what's she like? I saw her spanking past in Søren Vognmand's best turn-out, and Hr. van Haag himself beside her, and a white hat and feathers and what-not. Is she a decent sort, now?"

" Yes, ever so."

" Well, that's a blessing. And I'm not the one to judge her hardly for the nasty things she said to poor old Poulsen when he came out with cuffs on and all to meet her on the steps. Like as not it was just thoughtlessness."

Hedvig frowned, and thought for a moment.

" That's Madam Hermansen been telling tales again," she said darkly.

Her mother bent over the coffee-pot and said softly :

" *Herregud*, we womenfolk are that way. What's put into us, it's bound to come out again. I thought myself it was lies about her saying that of the Toldbod being painted I don't know what—and the King's own monogram over the door and all."

Hedvig no longer felt inclined to take up the matter further. How could she explain that it was true, but that Fruen was as fine a lady as could be, all the same !

She changed the subject with a question :

" How's Sivert come to be sitting in there laughing all over his face ? "

" 'Twas your father himself called him in, and if he's laughing, poor lad, why, I doubt it's because he can smell the coffee."

" Is he going to have coffee in there ? "

" Yes, your father said himself . . ."

" Well, what's the world coming to now ! What's it all for ? "

" What's it for ? " Fru Egholm tried her best to appear as if she found it only natural, but Hedvig saw through her attempt with ease. " Well, he's offered to dig a well, and your father was ever so pleased, and said he might."

" Oh . . . that old business about the well ! Don't tell me father lets him sit in the parlour for that, now."

" Well . . . perhaps there was something else, too —about some sweethearting or something. . . ." Fru Egholm turned her back completely now. " But that's no business of mine. You'd better talk to your father and Sivert about that."

Fru Egholm took up the cups and saucers, arranged them with the ease of habit between her forearm and her breast, took the coffee-pot by the handle, and stepped briskly into the parlour.

Hedvig followed, laid her hat and jacket aside, and sat down beside her brothers. Egholm had his coffee at his own table.

Sivert fell to on his coffee and cakes with noisy delight.

" I've been thinking," he said, " if there's really any strength to speak of in stuff like this. When a man's going down into the earth, you know, he wants strengthening things. But perhaps you haven't heard about the great big well that's to be started on at once, to-morrow the very day ? "

" It's quite correct," put in his father, with ready support. " He's going to dig us a well. A palace like this ought to have a well of its own—that's clear."

" But what does he know about digging wells ? " asked Hedvig.

Sivert had to set down his cup and lean back on the settee to express his utter contempt.

" D'you mean to say, girl, I don't know how to dig a well ? Why, I've dug wells miles deep or more ; as near as could be. And then I only stopped because it was getting too hot to stand so far down. Wasn't tired, not a bit, nor anything else. Oh, I can do heaps of

things, you've no idea. Why, just at this very moment, with a well just starting, I'm tangled up in a love affair at the same time. Manage both as easy as winking."

" Look here, Sivert," said Hedvig, " we'll say nothing about the well, whether you can or you can't. But don't come telling me there's ever a girl that'd have you. That's too much."

Here Egholm interposed.

" Have him ? Lord, yes, the girl's only too pleased."

" Who is it, then ? "

Sivert blinked his eye with an air of mystery and did not answer, but his father coughed, and said :

" Well, he doesn't know himself yet, to tell the truth. Ahem . . . I haven't told him yet—there's no hurry about that. But I don't mind saying she's a very good girl—a fitting mate for Sivert in every way, and more. Daughter of one Bisserup, deceased. I don't remember her Christian name."

It was rarely that a free and joyful laugh was heard in Egholm's house. But at the moment he mentioned Bisserup's name, all saw at once the most ridiculous figure in the town, the draggled, blind, dilapidated scarecrow whose breeches hung down behind to his hocks. And next moment came the vision of his daughter Petrea, in short skirts and sloppy cloth shoes. All of them, the mother, Sivert, Hedvig, and Emanuel, burst out laughing, and it was minutes before they recovered.

Egholm tried to call them to order.

" Never mind what you say—it's a match for Sivert, and a match it's going to be."

Sivert enjoyed the joke hugely. With a comically serious air he said :

" There, now ! And I was just wishing and hoping it might be her ! She'll be nice to think of when I'm far deep down in my lovers' well ! "

But Hedvig felt suddenly out of spirits. Her face, flushed with laughing, lost its colour, and her cup rattled in its saucer as she said, with an attempt at composure :

" You surely don't mean to have that brushmaker into the family ? "

" You seem to forget that Bisserup's dead and buried long ago."

" And if he is, they'll still remember him for ages to come in the place—how he used to go about as a laughing-stock everywhere, stinking of filth and rags, and hanging on to Petrea's skirts with his great ugly fist."

" It's not our place to visit the sins of the father upon the children."

" Petrea herself's as bad as her father, or worse. And she's half mad herself, too, and . . ."

" And how many do you think'd be found all sane, if it came to the point ? Anyhow, it doesn't show if they are."

" Perhaps you'll say it doesn't show that her neck's all awry ? "

" Only on *one* side."

" That's meant to be funny, I suppose ! I've seen a lot of funny things, but never anything so utterly mad as this."

Hedvig had risen to her feet ; her face was perfectly white. Her mother nudged her from behind.

" How dare you, girl ! " said her father threateningly, but with a certain uneasiness in his voice.

" Dare ! I'm simply talking sense, that's all. But

you, you fancy every wild idea that comes into your head's to be carried out, though it drags you and mother and the rest of us in the dirt. And you've no sort of right to."

It looked as if the scene would end, as so often before, in Egholm's turning furious and doing ugly things. But this time it was not so. Egholm was grown more restrained now in various ways. He sat down facing them, and talked the matter over quietly, even with a sort of irony.

" So you think I make a mess of things on every possible occasion ? You consider I have played my cards with utter lack of skill—and that after I've worked my way up from the depths of poverty to the possession of a house and garden—not exactly a palace, perhaps, but yet good enough for you to honour it with your presence now and then—to a business that gives us a livelihood, and a name which in certain quarters is held good enough for some degree of credit ? "

" I didn't say that, father. I know you've got on. Nobody can see that better than I can. But—but, after all, is it so much your own doing ? " (Here Hedvig flushed a little.) " I mean, I don't think you've looked after it as well as you might. Not as much as you did, say, with that steam-turbine that you fancied you'd invented. You were always running down to the sea all hours of the day, until the whole thing burst up and went to pieces. Huh ! And Madam Hermansen's bad leg, that you tried to cure with jelly-fish and messy things and saying prayers, and it's only got ever so much worse. And there's heaps of things . . . your own ideas and fancies, you don't mind working for them. But as for the business, it just looks after itself."

Egholm was evidently struck by her words, but he only said :

" It's hard, indeed, to have your own flesh and blood turn against you like this. As for the steam-turbine, I *did* invent it. It worked, as true as I'm alive. Sivert was there at the time. But I sacrificed it to God. He had given me a sign that it did not suit His purpose to have it known as yet. As for Madam Hermansen's leg, there are difficulties there, I admit, but I haven't given up hope. I seek and work and plague myself for the benefit of others. My inventions—aren't they all simply designed to bring in money to make things easier for you all ? And then you talk about mad fancies, and that's all the thanks I get ! "

" And your last mad fancy—I suppose you'll say that's all for our good as well ? "

" My last ? Which . . . what do you mean ? "

" I mean about Sivert and Bisserup's girl."

" Why, so it is. And in more ways than one."

" Huh ! "

" But of course a scatter-brained chit of a girl like you can't see it. The girl—she gets married, which is the destiny of woman. Sivert is elevated from the status of a loafer to the dignity of a family man. And finally—well, finally, I may say I don't consider it altogether a mad idea to get a little money into the family."

" She's as rich as a countess," said Sivert, with a chuckle. " Didn't you know ? "

" Exactly," said his father proudly.

" Saved up out of what they got from the parish, I suppose ? " said Hedvig.

" Quite possibly," answered Egholm, unmoved. " It's no business of ours to inquire into the sources of

their wealth. All we need trouble about is to pocket what falls to our share. They say her mattress is stuffed half and half with notes. I've heard it said. . . ."

Hedvig marked how her father's eyes glittered. And in a flash she remembered how they had glittered with just that look ever since she was a child, as often as any question of money arose. And a tumult of disgust and indignation rose in her, as she realised that no power on earth could deter him now from this last shameless plan of his. How he proposed to bring it about, and what foundations there might be for his confidence, she had no idea, but her heart shrank at the thought of having the whole town jeering once more at this new lunacy on her father's part.

She sprang up with a jerk, went to the piano and put on her jacket. Then, speaking with a firmness and emphasis that gave her words an almost prophetic weight, she said :

" Well, it's been a lovely evening, I'm sure. I came home here because I'd a grand and wonderful surprise for you, father. But you cut the ground from under my feet with your own. A beautiful surprise you had for me, wasn't it ?—a half-witted, wry-necked sister-in-law, of most respected family. So there's no need to trouble about *my* news now. It might be too much all at once."

" What are you talking about now ? " asked her father gently. He was always ready to listen to anything that savoured of mystery. " If you've anything to say worth saying, out with it. It's the least you can do after the way you've been going on."

" No ! " said Hedvig, quivering all over. " No. I'm going. And the lovely surprise I had for you, I'll bury it deep, never fear. And take good care it's never found."

" Why, then—there's the door," said her father in the same gentle voice. But this time there was an undertone of something darkly threatening. " Mind the step ! "

Hedvig went back to the Toldbod, and up to her room, opening the window wide to cool her cheeks. It was late when she undressed, and sat again for a little on her bed, her teeth chattering with cold. Then she got up and moved to draw the window to.

" Hedvig," called a voice from below. It was Sivert.

" What do you want ? "

" I want you to stop bothering about the old man's nonsense. I only backed him up because of the coffee and sitting in there. D'you think I ever meant it about Petrea ? No, thank goodness I'm a sight too conceited myself for that ! "

" Oh, what a miserable coward you are, Sivert."

" I am an awful coward, I know. But I'm awfully clever too. I just say Amen-so-be-it to it all, so I can go about at home just as I please and he never says a word. Think I'd be married to Petrea ? Never ! Who'd ask her, I should like to know ? Do you think I'd dare, even if I wanted to ? "

Hedvig laughed a little in spite of herself.

" No ! There you are ! " said Sivert joyfully. " I wouldn't dare, not to save my life. But what does it matter anyway ? We rub along all right as it is ; I get all I want to eat, and sing as much as I please, and dig away at ever so deep wells, just for the show of it. And all the time I'm dreaming of true love in heaven and earth. I've lifted up my eyes to a daughter of the fancy drapery, no less."

" Well, well, Sivert, it's all right. But get along now ; I'm cold."

" But d'you know who it is I've chosen ? Minna Lund. By the celebrated Lord Almighty, I swear it. Minna Lund and no other. Madness, isn't it ? "

" Oh yes, you're mad right enough. But . . . Good-night, Sivert."

" Anyhow, mad or not mad, she's to be my bride ! One fine day you'll see me as a son-in-law of the fancy drapery, and what will you say to that ? "

" If you're as ambitious as all that, the sooner you stop gadding about at nights like a vagabond, the better."

" I can't sleep. Haven't slept all day for all the worry and speculating about it—and after a sleepless day I never can sleep at night. I'm going down to the harbour now, and light the end of my cigar at the lantern on the mole. Farewell, dear sister mine. So glad you said that about being a vagabond because of going for a walk at night. I met Johan Fors only a few minutes back. Out with his violin and all. So that's two vagabonds out vagabonding to-night—what ? "

Hedvig drew back hastily, flushed with a sweet warmth. Johan Fors. . . . Ah ! His name was enough to make her dizzy, make her forget all else in the world. She sat up in bed with the clothes pulled up to her chin, and her legs curled under her. So Johan Fors was abroad to-night ? Johan Fors—there was a sort of strength about the name. And he was strong, yes. That brown, powerful neck of his—what did it matter that he wore no collar ? And as for the spots of paint all over his clothes, why, that too was a delight. When she told him about it : " Ugh, what a mess your clothes are in," he would look down at his dreadfully smeared waistcoat and ask innocently, " *Where ?* " Hedvig laughs happily under the bedclothes, her heart full of

Johan Fors. Her ice-cold feet come gradually back to life, as she shifts them alternately one over the other.

Malersvend,[1] she thinks to herself again—oh, but he is a kingly Malersvend (the words, *kongelig Malersvend,* have a sort of charm about them, and she repeats them proudly). He had been in Italy and in France. The other painters took off their hats to him in the street. Ay, and the masters too. And then he would take off his broad-brimmed hat again. If he happened to be wearing it, that is. Johan Fors often went about without a hat. And no wonder, with such a head of hair. Like a helmet in itself, set grandly on behind.

Hedvig thinks with delicious recollection of something Johan Fors had said to her one day about the way she walked. And then of his music, that every one agreed was wonderful. Hedvig herself has never heard it, but he has promised to play for her one day. He never plays for anyone, they say. And that is why he goes wandering off to the woods, or down to the shore, at night, with his violin in a leather bag. Hedvig would love to be a wild creature in the woods, or a little bird in a tree, to wake at his playing, and sit all night unseen under a leaf and listen.

But then, suppose she were to move, and he discovered her! He would not know who it was! He would be furious, snatch up his gun . . . Hedvig sees herself looking down into the blackness of a gun-barrel, and, above it, one of Johan Fors' blue eyes fixed on her. An instant more, and the shot rings out, and with a thrill of delicious terror she realises that she is dead.

No, not dead. Only awake now. She sits up in bed, marvelling to think how real it seemed. She had actually *seen* the flash when he fired. And she had

[1] Journeyman painter, as distinct from his master, "*Malermester.*"

heard his violin. Why, she could hear it still ! What—what was this ? She leaps out of bed and runs to the window. The music is still there. And there—she can see quite clearly—*by the wall of the church stands Johan Fors with his violin, his face turned towards her.*

From Hr. van Haag's bedroom close by comes the sound of a window fastening. And Hedvig realises that he must have pulled the window to with a bang—hence her dream of the gun.

Johan Fors has seen her now. He waves his big hat and comes a few steps nearer. The music spatters from the strings—a strange melody, that sets Hedvig trembling.

The man in the churchyard plays and plays, playing the grey sleepy night to shreds. His bow races and flashes furiously over the strings, till at last he throws out a sparkling shower of melody, and then all dies away in one long, breathless note from end to end of the bow. Then quickly he turns and moves away.

Hedvig strains her eyes to see—and marks with shame that her eyes are very wet. A little after, as she was going back to bed, came Johan Fors' voice below.

" Hedvig ! Did you hear me playing, Hedvig ? "

" Yes "—in a whisper.

" Did you like it ? "

" Yes, indeed."

" I made that up myself. It didn't sound properly, because the strings are all damp. But that wasn't why I stopped. Some one looked out of the window next door. So I stopped. There are three pieces really—they go together. I'll come up and play the rest. Throw me down the key, and I'll come."

Hedvig slips on some clothes and goes down herself.

" Why didn't you throw me the key ? " asks Johan Fors. " Now your feet 'll be cold."

Hedvig's heart swelled at the little thoughtful kindness, leaving no room for any suspicion. And it seemed the most natural thing in the world to let Johan Fors draw her to him and kiss her. His cheek was wet and cold.

" Now go back to bed while I play. Could you hear the first one was about the birds of passage coming again ? "

" Oh, but . . ." No, Hedvig feels she dare not. There—what a noise his step makes in the passage.

" Right—we'll stay down here," he agrees at once, and takes out his violin again.

" No, no, you mustn't play now ! "

" Mustn't play ? " he echoes in astonishment.

" No, no, you mustn't. They'd hear it all over the house, and somebody'd come."

" Well, what if they do ? Don't you want to hear the next one about the birds of passage finding their old place again ? "

" Not now. Oh, not now."

" But I tell you I made those pieces up myself. They aren't by anybody else. I got the end of the last two to-night, and I don't mind telling you they're splendid."

" Yes, but not now."

" Now, didn't you ask me yourself to play for you, and say any time would suit you ? It suits me now, for now they're finished, and now we'll go up and hear them."

" No ! Oh, you must be mad. Fancy coming here in the middle of the night playing to people when they're in bed."

Hedvig was on the verge of laughter, and inclined to say something ridiculous. But Johan broke in harshly :

" Then you're not what I thought you were."

Hedvig's lips trembled, as she said :

" Another time, if you like."

" There'll never be another time."

" Oh, but can't you understand . . ."

" I understand all right."

" Well, then . . ."

" I understand I've come to the wrong place, that's all."

" Not the wrong place, Johan—only the wrong time ! "

" Yes, I have. The girl I came to see's not here."

Hedvig's teeth were chattering with cold and emotion.

" Wasn't it me you came to see, then ? " She noticed herself that she called him " *De* " instead of " *Du*," [1] and the slight change seemed to bring an icy coldness with it.

Johan looked at her and looked away. Hedvig could not see his eyes, but when he spoke his voice was rough and harsh, making her inwardly helpless.

" No," he said. " It wasn't you I came to see. I came to see a girl that I could love, and play for a little. Not an empty nightdress like you—no, nor a silly little goose like you either ! "

Hedvig turned and walked away on her bare feet But Johan's words pursued her, nudging her as it were from behind, till she almost stumbled.

" I don't care about you a bit. You're nothing. Yes, you are something. And I'll tell you what,

[1] *i.e.* using the more formal mode of address.

You're just as ordinary as anybody else. That's what you are. Like a paving-stone in a stone pavement, that's what you are. Remember that. There's thousands just like you—thousands!"

Hedvig heard no more. She found her way to her room, and flung herself on the bed.

III

SIVERT thrust his angular legs unwillingly out of bed, yawned enormously, and stretched himself. The sun was sparkling in at his attic window. He looked round searchingly; here he was once more, bumped out of his own comfortable world where sleep and dreams were supreme, into cold-blooded, hostile earth. There lay his clothes, in limp, scattered heaps; now he would have to get into them, and take up the struggle for life once more. Ah me! Had his father gone, he wondered, so he could hope for a cup of coffee in peace with his mother? Oh, if a man could only sleep undisturbed for a hundred years! Sivert had dreamed most wondrously that night, of wandering round in the apartments of Købmand Lund, holding Minna by the hand, while her father, little Lund himself, laid his head on one side and watched them, a picture of smiling goodwill. And Sivert had been elegantly dressed that night—in his green suit. The recollection of it drove him to the wardrobe, to enjoy the sight of it in reality. Yes, there it was. But alas! there it would have to stay.

Then suddenly came a bright idea. With shaking hand he takes down the precious suit, pulls on the trousers backwards, as if stealing into them by a hidden way, puts on the waistcoat stealthily, and steals into the jacket; then, having routed out collar and tie from a drawer, he stands before the little mirror,

laughing delightedly at his plan, and muttering to himself :

" Devil take it, if I can't propose I might at least *pretend to* ! "

Egholm came home just as Sivert came down the stairs from the attic. He noticed the unwonted splendour at once, and started. He frowned at first, but his brow cleared, and he said :

" That's right. You remember what we agreed."

This fairly started Sivert on his facile descent ; retreat was no longer possible.

For the present everything went swimmingly. His father indicated with a motion of the hand that Sivert might sit down at table and have his meal with him.

" And what are you going to say to her ? " he asked. His eyes were alight with eagerness to take up the task.

Sivert reached out boldly and helped himself to food ; he felt he was a person of importance at the moment.

" I'll manage it easily ; you leave it to me."

" But how are you going to begin ? "

" I'm not going to begin at all."

" What do you . . . ? "

Sivert emptied his mouth, smiled shyly, and half rose from his seat.

" I'm all dressed up in my green suit," he said. " Isn't that enough ? "

" Oh, splendid ! I forgot. And so you'll just show yourself, as it were, and let the sight of you do the rest ? "

" The sight of me will do it all," said Sivert.

" Excellent. And then ? "

"Why, then, I take it *she* will begin."

Sivert's faculties were concentrated to the full on the business of the moment, to wit, of eating. He answered at hazard, trusting to the inspiration of the moment, without seeing a step beyond.

"You've the making of a general in you, my boy."

"By the grace of God," said Sivert solemnly, swallowing a huge mouthful, "I hope to do you credit in this affair."

Fru Egholm came in from the kitchen.

"If you ask me, I think you'd better let it keep for a bit, and see how things go," she said, referring to the proposed proposal.

"Let it keep? Whatever for? It's the early bird, you know . . ."

"The early bird's apt to get caught for his pains if he doesn't look what he's doing."

"If you've nothing but that sort of nonsense to say, you'd better keep out of it. Sivert needs encouragement, not old wives' foolery."

"Well, well, just as you please."

"Who's that outside there?" Egholm had caught a scraping of feet in the kitchen.

"Oh, nobody," said Fru Egholm uneasily.

But just at that moment Hedvig herself came in, pale and red-eyed after the events of the night. Her father drew himself up sternly, but Hedvig tried to smile.

"And what brings you here, young lady, may I ask?"

"I came to ask you, father," said Hedvig, the smile on her face flickering up and vanishing like the flame of a lamp run dry—"I came to ask you if we hadn't better make it a bargain, with the business we spoke of last night?"

" I've no recollection of any business last night."

" I mean, the surprise I've got for you, if you'll give up all idea of making a scandal with Sivert and Petrea Bis."

" Er—h'm! A surprise, you say. Is it anything of money value ? "

" Well, no, but . . ."

" It would take twenty thousand *Kroner* to make it a bargain. That's the amount of Petrea's fortune, at least."

That " at least " filled Hedvig with indignation anew, and froze the last of her smile. It meant that her father was still building unfounded castles in the blackest dark. She had worked out two ways of averting the disaster. One was to make a joke of it, by calling it a bargain. If only she could have made her father smile, much would have been gained. But this attempt had failed. Her one alternative was to throw herself at his feet and beg of him to refrain. A woman always reckons with the possibility of getting what she wants by favour. Now, under her father's merciless eye, favours were evidently nowhere, and she cast the idea aside contemptuously. She turned to Sivert, who, with downcast eyes, had continued his meal without slackening speed.

" Sivert," she said entreatingly, " you remember what you promised ? "

Sivert giggled evasively. " What promise ? "

" Didn't you stand outside my window last night and swear you'd have nothing to do with all this ? " said Hedvig passionately.

" Last night . . . ? "

" Oh, you remember well enough ! "

" What did I look like ? "

" You looked like the miserable little beast that you are ! "

" You've got hold of the wrong little beast, I think. Was it me with a violin, you mean, scraping away so merrily among the tombstones ? And you stood at the window in your nightdress, and came down afterwards and let me into the Toldbod's sacred walls ? And did I say I was a painter, and my name Johan ? "

Hedvig felt a venomous tooth at her very heart ; the poison almost stupefied her. She drew a deep breath or so, and would have spoken ; then, bowing her head, she walked out. Her mother called to her, " Hedvig, dear . . . " but she went on without looking back.

Egholm turned to Sivert. " What was that about last night ? " he asked.

" Oh, she's off her head, and seeing ghosts. And then to come along here and spoil things when we were as comfortable as could be. . . . "

Somehow the comfortableness of things seemed to have vanished. Some one came to be " taken." And Egholm's face wrinkled nervously, irritably. Nothing wore down his strength more than the business of his profession. He never got to take it as a matter of habit. There was some peculiarity about his brain which made him invent, as it were, the whole science of photography for every plate he exposed, and as photography had long since ceased to interest him, the invention cost him untold mental effort. Egholm invented *walking* every time he crossed the room ; he invented *mastication* at every meal ; but these things, and indeed all else, were a constant source of interest to himself. Only photography—which by ill-luck was just the thing he had to live by—bored him unspeakably.

After going into the waiting-room and inviting two peasant girls in their best finery to be seated, his feeling towards Sivert changed.

"Why haven't you gone?" he asked. "You make such a beastly noise over your food—I don't want to hear it any more."

Sivert's mouth was absolutely crammed at the moment; he swallowed the mass without chewing it, and the Adam's apple in his throat, big enough at the best of times, jumped like a rat in a sack.

"Half a minute," he said. "Before I go—wouldn't you say, now, I'm quite decent-looking—what?"

His father looked him up and down coldly.

"No," he said. "I shouldn't. You look like an abominable home-made idiot."

"Well, then, don't you think—we might as well give it up?"

"Give it up! You hold your tongue, and be off with you this minute!"

"Then you'd better lend me a *Krone*, to—well, to improve my appearance."

"Blackmail! Oh, well, here you are, and be off with you. And if you're not back here in an hour's time with something sensible to report, I'll . . ."

Egholm carried the unspoken threat into his dark room. But Sivert felt himself consigned to something darker still.

Two hours later—dinner-time. Emanuel comes home from school, and learns of the morning's happenings from his mother. Now and again Egholm himself passes restlessly through the kitchen, frowning in evident anxiety. Fru Egholm and Emanuel lapse into silence while he is near. Now that the plan is actually on foot, there seems nothing amusing about it at all.

Where is Sivert all this time ? Thrown himself into the sea, perhaps, finding no other way of escape. And Hedvig—will she lose her place when the scandal is known ? Fru Egholm is filled with bitter thoughts as she moves among her pots and pans, running her fingers through her hair from time to time. And yet, she cannot but admit that this is a mere nothing compared with what she has been through before.

Egholm's manner gives no clue to what is in his mind. At the moment he is seated at his table, head buried in his hands, brooding heavily.

Emanuel plucks his mother by the sleeve. She glances round : *outside, under the cherry tree, stands Sivert himself.* Sivert, limp and miserable, looking up at the house.

They sign to him encouragingly, but he shakes his head.

Then suddenly Egholm rises to his feet and goes to the door. He catches sight of Sivert at once, and goes towards him with heavy steps.

" What the devil are you doing there ? " he asks furiously. " Anyone'd think you'd hanged yourself, and been cut down too soon."

Why doesn't he run away ? thought Emanuel.

Sivert did not run away. His lips parted in a generous but uncomfortable smile, and he said :

" Must have time to get over it a bit, you know."

His father stared at him blankly.

" Well, you'd better come in, anyway. Give him something to eat ! "

Sivert straightened himself up and followed his father into the house, exchanging uncomprehending glances with his mother and Emanuel.

" Well, what did you say to her ? Hurry up ! "

" Oh, heaps of things. Quite an interesting conversation."

" Did you say anything about her father's funeral? That's what I should have started with."

" Yes, that's just what I did too."

" Well, and what then? "

" Well, we talked about that for a bit It was a first-rate coffin, she said, at the price. Good solid bit of work."

" A pretty conversation, with the pair of you! Go on! "

" Then I asked what it cost—fifty *Kr.* And where they got it—from Andreasen's. If it was black? And how many handles—eight."

" Yes, yes, that's all very well. But get along. What about the proposal? How did you set about it? "

" Well, I didn't set about it much."

" For Heaven's sake, man, what did you do, then? "

Here Fru Egholm interposed. The boy must have time to swallow a mouthful of food.

Egholm waited a few minutes; then, with a sudden suspicion, he burst out violently:

" You scoundrel, you haven't been there at all! "

Sivert thrust one hand into his pocket, drew out a brand-new scrubbing-brush, and set it down without a word in front of his father's plate.

" By Heaven, but he has! " said Egholm, completely appeased by the proof. And he remained patiently silent until Sivert had finished his meal.

Fru Egholm began clearing the things away; Sivert leaned back on the settee.

" Funny thing, isn't it," he began. " But I've clean forgotten it all now."

" Oh, don't worry him now," said his mother. " A

young man's always bashful about such things, and natural enough too."

"I don't want to hear about '*such things*' at all. But surely he can tell us whether it went off all right or not."

"Well, it went off really better than I'd ever dreamed."

"She said yes? For Heaven's sake, man, can't you say yes or no?"

Sivert began to show signs of anger. He had eaten all he could, so there was nothing to lose in that respect.

"It's no good shouting like that," he said; "ordering a fellow about. You're very clever, no doubt, but you don't know a thing about proposing and mysteries of that sort. Perhaps you did in the days of the ancients, when you were young—but you don't now. I went there to propose, and that's the truth. And then she comes sliding in in her cloth shoes, and her head on one side like a lame duck in a thunderstorm. All well and good. But in the back room behind the shop there was her mother in bed with her chin not shaved, and a crutch across the coverlet. So what could I do but buy a scrubbing-brush. Scrubbing-brushes were nearest on the counter."

"And you mean to say that's all you did? Bought a scrubbing-brush?"

"After a bit I bought another one. Likewise a nail-brush."

Sivert drew forth the mentioned articles and set them beside the first. Egholm fingered the things absently, shook his head, and said:

"Good heavens! Was there ever such a fool!"

"It made a first-rate impression," said Sivert con-

fidently. " Just as I was buying the nail-brush at last—I bought the things separately, you know, and paid for them separately, to spin it out, though the place stank like a pair of long boots—the mother beast inside stuck out her crutch and pushed the door open wide, to get a better look at me in my elegant suit, with collar and tie and a cigar alight."

" What about your intended ? Did she say anything at all ? "

" Not a word, but you ought to have seen me striding proudly out of the place, all the same—' *Farvel, Frøken !* ' hat up and down stiffly like a pump-handle, the way they do in Silkeborg. I've been in Silkeborg myself more than once, and got on first-rate with the girls."

Egholm gave way to a short laugh here and there, when his imagination followed the scene in detail—Sivert in the little, evil-smelling shop—but after a while he said harshly :

" The business is not finished with yet. I must think over what's the next thing to do. Meanwhile, you can set to work on the well."

" I can't go digging wells in my best suit," pleaded Sivert.

" You may go digging stark naked for all I care. But dig you shall, and that within the next half-hour. You understand ? "

Sivert went up reluctantly to exchange his green magnificence for a pair of working trousers and a blue blouse. Emanuel went with him. Emanuel thought there was no one in the world so amusing as brother Sivert. No one could make pea-shooters as he did ; certainly no one could ever tell such dreadfully exciting stories without end.

Sivert stripped to the skin; he was in excellent spirits now.

"There," he said. "That's what a real live man looks like. I'll give you five minutes to view. Ever see such muscles? No, of course not."

Suddenly he dropped his voice to a confidential whisper.

"Emanuel, my one and only chosen brother! Hear now how the blessing of God descended upon my head. I didn't go straight to Bisserup's, but stayed out in the churchyard quite a while, deep in thought. By reason of a miracle that happened. Namely, this: Just as I got to Bisserup's door, who should I meet? Minna Lund, my beloved! And do you think I'd ever give her up? No! (Thanks, thanks, Emanuel, for shaking that innocent head. I'll tell you, after, all about how I plundered the corpse of the Burgomaster in Slagelse). No, and for ever no! I walked past gay and casual as could be, and took off my hat with respectful earnestness. Like this!"

"And did she nod to you?"

"To tell the truth, sonny, I don't know. You see, I couldn't help looking the other way. But that yellow dog of hers was with her, a little behind. I know the creature personally, from visiting at her father's house."

"And did it wag its tail?"

"Like anything! And I feel now," added Sivert triumphantly, "with ever-increasing conviction, that I shall one day lead my Minna home as my true and faithful wife! Now come along with me, and I'll show you the short cut through to hell!"

IV

A TEMPEST of spring-cleaning, shifting of furniture, and general rearrangement raged about the Toldbod for some weeks. Fru van Haag went about in an outlandish costume, with a coloured handkerchief about her head, and a long yellow smock suggestive of the land. This outer garment she kept scrupulously buttoned, doubtless with good reason in the lack of adequate coverings underneath. Only her shoes were beyond reproach; little shiny buckle shoes, set with blue stones. Her eyes shone with a fever of command. Hedvig and a charwoman enlisted for the occasion were flung from cellar to attic, their mistress exposing them and herself to peril of their lives in the mounting of ladders and balancing on chair-backs merely to see if a picture *could* be got to hang here or there. Mostly, it could not. Fru van Haag would decide the question with a careless pronouncement of sentence; the light was impossible, or the thing was "simply killed" by the chiffonier. Malle Duse, the hireling, opined that such objections were rank superstitions; all very grand, no doubt, but none the less reprehensible. How could the chiffonier hurt a picture hanging half a yard away? Hedvig smiled and shook her head; she had leapt light-footed into the realm of taste, and revelled in it all. Already her mistress had entrusted her, as a matter of course, with full powers in the selection of flowers for the rooms, though here, above all, there was the risk of

committing enormities against the wall-paper or curtains. Hr. van Haag was billeted *en pension* with Fru Vang. His chatelaine, in his absence, took her meals in the kitchen. Apparently she enjoyed it, and even took a particular pleasure in mimicking little eccentricities of Malle Duse, such as picking her teeth with a splinter of firewood, or drinking coffee from the saucer. This last manœuvre especially took her fancy, as a practical means of getting hot coffee down quickly. Then she could return to the work in hand with redoubled zest. For the first few days Malle Duse herself looked with marked disfavour upon this superfluous haste ; after that, however, she seemed to recover her own lost youth and spirits. She would suddenly burst into song—song of an order terrific, yet with a power of encouragement in it both for herself and the others. Raucous as a savage war-cry it echoed through the place from morning early to evening late, a single strophe incessantly repeated, until every lumbering piece of furniture was polished and in place, carpets spread, curtains and pictures hung, apartments and inventory swept and garnished, washed and ironed and starched, and the heavy atmosphere of the house changed to a freshness as of the very breeze from the Belt. Not until then did her song die away in a wail, and having ended, she thanked the lady of the house profusely, as if she had been a guest on holiday. By that time Fruen and Hedvig also were well pleased as the Lord with His creation on the seventh day. But, weary as slaves. Fruen sat down on the edge of the kitchen table, Hedvig on a chair at her feet. A final cup of coffee ; they drank with each other, and laughed weakly. Then suddenly Fruen bent forward, placed one emphatic finger on Hedvig's breast, and said :

" Who was he ? "

" Who ? "

" He." Fruen waved one arm in the air, with a marvellous imitation of Johan Fors raising his hat.

Hedvig blushed furiously, and said :

" I really don't know what you mean ? "

" Didn't you hear him playing ? The little man with the big hat ? "

" He's *not* little ! " Hedvig burst out hotly.

Fruen laughed.

" Aha, my dear ! Well, I'll ask no more, though I should love to know a little more about him. I never heard such music. Tell me one thing, though—does he live here ? "

" Yes," said Hedvig, with bowed head.

" Extraordinary place," said Fruen, and sat silent for a while. Her eyes grew dark ; she was thinking, no doubt, of her first arrival ; a moment later she had evidently moved on ahead, for she broke out suddenly :

" Oh, Hedvig, I forgot. What did your father say ? "

" He sent his kind regards," said Hedvig mechanically. She had long been prepared for the question, and had her answer ready.

" Is that all ? Sent his kind regards ! What did he say ? Wasn't he astonished ? "

" Yes."

" Oh ! Not much, eh ? "

" Well, he—he's got such a lot of things to think about."

" But surely he remembered me ? "

Hedvig had thought out the whole thing carefully beforehand, and found no way but to lie in self-defence. But it hurt her now to see it spread. She began hesitatingly something about her father's being so queer, not like other people. . . .

"Of course he's not," said Fruen, with a smile. "But what *is* he like?"

It was not so easy to say. Hedvig's mind was full at the moment of his latest shameful manœuvres with Sivert and the brushmaker's daughter. But that was too much for anyone else to understand. She chose rather to tell of her father's inventions. Her cheeks flushed with shame as she told how he had made a machine thing, some years back—a turbine he called it—that was fixed in a rotten old boat patched up with rags and bits of gutter pipe and things, and people came down to the beach in hundreds to see the wonderful thing he'd talked so much about. But all they saw was a man with his face all smeared with soot and dirt, a barefooted man sitting in the boat, poking and stoking, a laughing-stock for the whole town.

Hedvig looked up, but the indignation that filled her at her own recital found no reflection in her mistress's face. Fruen was to all appearance keenly interested.

Then Hedvig went on to tell of the house-building. Her father, she explained in a choking voice, had bought up material *from the old workhouse* when it was pulled down. Over thirty loads of beams and planks and doors, bricks and tiles and all sorts of refuse. Rotten and filthy every bit of it. Then he and Sivert and Ditlev Pløk had stuck the crumbling baulks up endwise in holes dug in the ground, and nailed planks across for walls. Of all the mad, ungainly ways of building a house. A chicken-house, or a pigsty, perhaps, but for human beings. . . . ! And all the town laughed, of course, till their sides ached. It was no pleasant thing in those days to be known in Knarreby as Egholm's girl. Sivert, trying to be funny, had got together a whole heap of inner boards with wall-paper still on, and stuck them

up right facing the road. "And of course people said clever things about our wonderful house that was papered on the outside."

Hedvig drew a deep breath.

"And do you still live there in the queer little house?" asked her mistress gently.

"Father did it all over with some sort of mortar stuff when it was done, and whitewashed it after. But what's the good of hiding it up like that, when every soul in the town knows it's rotten all through inside?"

"But, my dear child, I can't see what you're so angry about? If your father hasn't the money—and I don't suppose he has—how could he buy all kinds of expensive things to build with?"

"If he couldn't afford to get the proper things, what did he want to buy for at all? We might have stayed where we were and paid rent, but father, he wanted to say he owned the place—that's what it was, I know, that made him buy up the bit of ground that was going cheap. And the workhouse people gave him credit for three months."

Now here was Hedvig saying all sorts of damaging things against her father, and lo, the effect on Fru van Haag was just the reverse of what it should have been. *Her* imagination built up a picture of a man, restless, ambitious, fighting bravely against the enormously superior force of poverty. It was a figure approaching very nearly to an ideal. How divinely different, at any rate, from her own husband. And she burned with a sense of injustice done to herself, in being thus saddled with a creature so useless as he.

For, if women were ever to be anything but a futility, even a hindrance in the world, surely it was their mission to influence, to make something out of, their husbands

and children. And what a husband for the purpose was this of hers! Hr. van Haag selected his striped trousers with scrupulous care, he cleared his throat and smoothed his moustaches and glanced with self-satisfaction into every mirror on his way. Beyond that, he did nothing, absolutely nothing, in life—could not, would not do more.

They had travelled in the principal countries of Europe—on her money. Hr. van Haag had learned in the course of those voyagings that excellent tailors were to be found in Paris and London, Vienna and Rome. He knew the shop windows of a host of towns, and how they reflected his passing image. That was as far as *his* mind had been broadened by travel.

No, she thought to herself, if she had only prevented her father from dismissing Kasper Egholm in the old days . . .

A woman remembers every trifling detail of a love affair to her last breath. But there was nothing trifling here. Such white-hot love as that she had never, never met with since. She felt the truth of it now, and sighed.

That errant mind of his might have been hers to curb and guide. . . . Fru van Haag set her muscles at the strain, with a feeling as if she were actually holding in a refractory horse.

Hedvig was annoyed to find her words apparently of so slight effect. But she had other cards to play.

"And then father goes about thinking he's a holy man of God, and everything he does is to the glory of the Lord, as if every bit of bread and dripping you put in his hand were given him from Heaven. He prays like this: 'O God, do lend me fifty *Kroner*!'—I've heard him myself—he made me join in too, once, when I lived at home."

"But — heavens . . . then he really believes in God?"

"Believes . . . well, yes," said Hedvig hesitatingly.

"Strange. . . ."

"But there's plenty of people believe, only *they* don't go dragging the Lord about after you like a boy with a dead cat on a string."

"Are there, though? Who, for instance?"

"Well, there's the priest."

"No, my dear Hedvig, don't come telling me that. The priest himself believe in God? I know this is quite a remarkable little town in many ways, but . . ."

This was beyond Hedvig altogether. What?—the priest who had confirmed her—didn't he believe in God? She could not help laughing at the idea.

But her mistress did not laugh. She sat there, deeply earnest, with big, wondering eyes, leaning forward a little, with her hands clasped under one knee. After a little while she said:

"He'd be the first one that did, if so. I mean, of course, *believe* quite simply. That's the only thing that counts, really. I know all about their theological quibbles and humbug. But you say your father simply asks God to lend him fifty *Kroner*. *That's* the genuine thing. The man who says he believes, but *couldn't pray for fifty Kroner*—he doesn't count. He's just a fraud, a whited sepulchre."

But Hedvig could not lose this point too; all her convictions were at stake. Better throw aside all reserve and out with the worst at once.

"You couldn't find a bigger fraud than father," she said. "You don't know him, Fru van Haag. But I do. I've seen him lie flat on the floor, making up to God, and then get up and be the cruellest, brutalest bully

five minutes after. I won't say a word of what he's done to me and my brother Sivert, but he's struck mother more than once, yes—knocked her down ! "

Hedvig sprang up from her chair and stood facing her mistress with flashing eyes.

" Yes, he's done that," she said.

What would this delicate, upright flower of ladyhood say to that ? Surely a woman must always be incensed at the story of another woman wronged ?

Fru van-Haag closed her eyes, and said :

" I could quite imagine your father would not easily find the right woman to manage his temperament. Your mother, now, isn't she a little woman, rather a weakly sort ? Ah, I thought as much. No, no, my dear, you can't judge of these things so simply and easily just from one side ; they're far too complicated. Temperament's just fire. It needs to be fed, and guarded, and kept within its proper bounds. But fire's a dangerous thing. Your mother, I fancy, is just a child who has burned her fingers. You and I must not judge your father, dear, but understand him."

" I shall never understand he's anything but a tyrant ! "

" Ah, you'll soon get tired of that, I'm sure."

" No ! Why ? "

Fruen slipped down from the table, busy with her own thoughts.

" Why ? Oh, if for no other reason, because it's such an ordinary point of view."

" Ordinary ? "

" Yes, *ordinary.* Abominably ordinary."

Hedvig sat down slap on her kitchen chair, almost in tears.

" Is it such a dreadful thing to be like other people ? "

"Yes!" said Fru van Haag. "Ordinary life's just nothing-and-water. Ah, I know it! Keep away from everything ordinary, tread on it, spit on it, I say! One day you'll see your father in a different light."

V

EGHOLM is furious. His plans have been upset in the meanest fashion. Sivert has run away.

It takes two to make a couple. And Egholm argues confusedly that if he had only had Sivert, he could have got hold of Petrea all right, and then there would have been a couple!

But Sivert is gone, having left a note as follows: "*Fondest love, write soon. Your loving son,* SIVERT, *Glazier. Seeing I love another.*"

"Ungrateful scoundrel," says Egholm, trampling on the letter of farewell.

"Doesn't it say where he's gone to?" asks his mother sadly.

"No, and I don't care. When he can treat his parents in that heartless way."

"But perhaps they wouldn't have been happy after all."

"They? No, but *I* should!"

"Never mind, Egholm, my dear, it may be all right after all. I don't believe really she's got anything to speak of. They owe money right and left, so I've heard."

"And what then? Every *Øre* they owe means so much more capital in hand," argued Egholm fanatically, and he went off in a fury for his morning walk.

He considered the possibility of tracking down Sivert, catching him, bringing him back home alive or

. . . No, he would be no use, of course, unless he were alive. But since neither the neighbours nor anyone else apparently had seen anything of Sivert's movements, he was forced at last to give up the chase and return home. It was dinner-time when he got back. His wife stood by the stove; would it please him to have dinner now?

"Whenever you like," he answered graciously, somewhat softened by the smell of food.

Anna hurried as well as she could. She had got in a good piece of steak for the occasion. That is, Egholm was to have steak; she herself had little appetite just now. How could she think of eating, with her darling Sivert wandering Heaven knows where?

But the wonder-working properties of that piece of steak surpassed all she had ever imagined. Just as she was tipping it out on to a dish, sending a most appetising odour abroad—lo! a hand and the sleeve of a green jacket thrust down from the trap-door in the loft above, beckoning to her. No face was to be seen—nothing beyond that beckoning arm, but it was quite enough. Not only does she recognise the sleeve, but she has further reasons for supposing that Sivert himself is attached thereto, and directing its motions towards the dish of meat. Her motherly cares evaporate at once; she laughs indeed, all over her face, as she bears in the dish to her husband. Luckily, he noticed nothing.

A moment later she is creaking softly up the stairs with two nice pieces on a plate. She shakes her head and smiles, playfully threatening, at Sivert, who smiles back delightedly, plays an imaginary concertina, and is generally amusing. Then, taking her hand, he leads her across the loft through the piled-up rubbish lying about everywhere.

Right at the farther end he had fixed up a tent, with a piece of old sailcloth. It was invisible a few steps away, there being no window at that end. Inside the tent he had shifted one of the tiles in the roof, letting in a thin streak of light. His mother saw he had been passing the time with a heap of dusty back numbers of the illustrated papers, and had made some sort of a bed for himself out of sacks and old clothes. They whispered together.

" Sivert dear, you're not going to stay away for long ? "

" Lord, don't talk about coming back already ! Why, I've only just started. I'm happy enough wherever I may be in the wide world ; none of your homesickness and that sort about me."

" Well, well, as long as you're not farther away, dear, it's not so bad. Is your dinner all right ? "

" A trifle more pepper wouldn't hurt it."

" Oh, you always want such a lot, I know. Wait a minute. I'll . . ."

" Thanks. But hurry up, you know, or I'll have eaten it all before you get back."

" Yes, yes, dear. I'll stick the pepper-box up the trap-door and you can take it yourself."

" Yes, that'll do. Only too pleased to help you laying the table," says Sivert, all overflowing with kindliness.

That same day Emanuel was initiated into the secret of Sivert's concealment. He found it a splendidly romantic idea, and spent most of his time up in his brother's cave. They arranged a code of signals ; when the door of the stove was shut with a bang, Sivert would creep down and bury himself deep under his pile of rags —there was danger at hand. But when Emanuel started playing " Sailors bold " on his comb-and-paper,

it meant that the dreaded one was putting on his things to go out, and Sivert might have hopes. Then, when the tune changed to " Once more the woods are green," the voluntary prisoner would come clambering down the ladder, blinking at the light, with cobwebs in his hair, but in the best of spirits, as also in his best of clothes. He declared that he was going to continue his travels thus for a hundred years or so.

" But I'm sure it's not good for you to be up there doing nothing," said his mother anxiously.

" Oh, I've got a splendid constitution ; I can stand it all right."

" If only you could use a needle and thread, then . . ."

" Give me a couple of needles. That's just what I was wanting. Never mind about the thread."

" Or suppose you practised writing a bit, with pen and ink . . ."

" Yes, let me have some ink. You can keep the pen."

" Oh, you silly ! Going to sew without thread and write without a pen ? What are you up to now, I wonder ? "

" Don't ask me. It's a matter connected with my heart's love," says Sivert mysteriously.

" Ah, then I won't," said his mother, touched at the thought. " After all, it's love that makes the world go round. Here's the needles, dear. Now, I'll see and get hold of some ink for you."

" What's it going to be for ? " asked Emanuel, when they got back to the den once more.

" Patience, my son, and you'll grow wise. In two days' time there's an inscription to be unveiled, and you shall be in the front row if you're good."

Never had Sivert been so wonderful a brother as now. Emanuel only hoped the present exciting state of things might last.

Two days later, Sivert began unbuttoning his coat and vest solemnly, without a word. Emanuel stares at him in wonder: What on earth is going to happen now? Then he pulls his shirt aside, and lo! there on his chest is a long and remarkable piece of tattooing.

Emanuel was beside himself with delight.

"Read it!" commanded Sivert.

"But—it's Hebrew or something. . . . What's it supposed to mean?"

"Mean? Why, what it says! *Minna Lund*—can't you see?"

"Minna Lund? No, that I can't. It's—it's wrong, somehow."

"D'you mean to say I can't *spell*?"

"Why—why, of course . . . *it's all backwards!*"

With trembling hand Sivert took out a small looking-glass and examined the inscription. His sunken chest made it easier for him to read in the glass.

"What are you talking about? It's not backwards at all."

"No, not in the glass, but when you look at it yourself. You've written it looking-glass way!"

"Wonderful!"

"But what's the good of it that way?"

Sivert pondered a moment, then he said:

"That way? Why, what's the use of it any other way, when it's all hidden under my shirt? No, you're supposed to see it *from inside*! I can look through my own delicate skin and read her lovely name the right way round. Minna, it says, and Lund—Minna Lund. You don't expect me to go showing everybody my own

beloved's name, do you? Of course not! Say no, Emanuel, dear Emanuel, do!"

Ah, but Sivert was a real hero—never a question but was child's play to him. Besides being chock-full of mysteries and stories. He lay there on his rag bed and told stories in a whisper, the weirdest stories, crammed with ghosts and corpses and things. Emanuel listened breathlessly.

"And what then?" he asked greedily, when Sivert stopped to moisten his lips.

When it grew dark, Emanuel's face shone like a little white moon. All the uncanny things crept nearer. And Sivert felt his power over the child's sensitive mind. Just when it was time for Emanuel to go, however unwillingly, he would say:

"If you step on anything soft, you'll know it's the corpse of a woman I've got lying up here. Mind her long hair doesn't trip you up!"

Emanuel knew well enough that the corpse in question was a piece of poetic exaggeration; nevertheless, his heart was thumping as he turned away, and he lifted his feet with unusual care as he groped his way between the piles of rubbish to the trap-door.

Those were days of wonder, golden days, for the two brothers.

Not so, however, for their mother. Wonder enough, perhaps, but nothing golden.

It was none so easy, in the long run, with this double housekeeping, half of which had to be kept strictly private and confidential. Sivert grew impatient and irritable with his long confinement. He complained about the food, and in particular insisted on meals being served punctually to the minute, which made things extremely awkward. And he had a means of enforcing

his demands: *he could threaten to be found out himself.* Just as she was going through with a dish for Egholm in the parlour, Sivert would thrust an arm through the trap-door and beckon. She answered by pointing to the door: it was only right and reason that the master of the house should be first served. But Sivert took an empty plate and rattled it on the floor so audibly it was a marvel his father did not hear. And the rattling would continue until the first course was diverted into the channel indicated.

Egholm's anger had not abated. He called on his brain to find a solution of the problem. One day he went himself to Bisserup's and bought a moustache brush, in order to spy out the land, and though he found there nothing beyond dirt and poverty, the visit left him more intent on his plan than ever. The moment he got back, he sent for Emanuel.

"Where do you get to all day, boy? Do you ever look at your lessons? Seems to me you're always running upstairs to the loft nowadays."

Emanuel screwed his eyes up triangle-wise, and explained with a wavering smile that he had been up there once or twice catching flies for his jackdaws. He knew his lessons all right, yes. He was top of the class, in fact.

"Good! Mind you stay there, and don't let me see you turn out a ne'er-do-well like your brother Sivert. I've great hopes of you, when you grow up a bit. You've all my wisdom and experience to inherit and put to use, so you've something to look forward to."

Emanuel had but the vaguest idea as to what precisely was implied by "wisdom and experience," but he was thankful to find his father so easy-tempered at the moment.

" And I'll declare unto you the innermost secrets of religion, so you can make yourself rich and happy in no time. The art of prayer, whereby a man can pin the Lord down to His word so there's no escape—I'll teach you that. How to get round and outflank Him unawares, aim one of His own texts at Him point-blank, and ' Hands up ! ' "

This last idea, with its savour of bushranging and such-like exploits, appealed at once to the boy's imagination. He was accustomed to hearing his father deal with the Scriptures as an inflexible code of law, but this was more exciting still.

" Talking about fighting the Devil—it's a thousand times more difficult to keep your end up when you're fighting God Himself. You've got to get a grip of Himself. Wrestle Him out of breath, till He gives in."

In Bible readings none excelled Emanuel. He laid his head on one side, and his blue eyes glittered as he said :

" Jacob did that—wrestling with the Lord. But then the Lord did something to one of his legs, and he was lame."

" Exactly ! That's just what He's done to me, only, unfortunately, it was before I'd got Him down. My son, it is for you to avenge your father's defeat—in the fullness of time. You're a bit young yet, of course. Still, you might be some use in an ordinary tussle with mortal things—yes, you could help me there. I dare say you know what I'm thinking of now ? "

Emanuel had no idea. There was the boat, he knew, that wanted scraping, but it was not a task he cared about at all. He refrained from guessing *that.*

" Give it up, eh ? " said his father. " Well, it's this business with Petrea. I've been wondering if you

couldn't propose to her yourself—on Sivert's behalf, of course. Then we should have her fixed up all right when the rascal himself takes it into his head to come back home. He's never stayed away very long before."

"It's so silly," protested Emanuel, blushing.

"Silly? Not a bit of it. And I'm not asking you to do it for nothing. Look here"—Egholm took out his purse—"this, my son, is money. Twenty-five *Øre.* We stick it up on the edge of this bracket, so. Right at the edge. And if you manage the business, then we can give it just the tiniest flick, and down it comes into your cap!"

In the shadowy grey lobes of Emanuel's brain, strange forces were at work. The part he was chosen to play disgusted him. But the praise, as represented by a 25-*Øre* piece, attracted him exceedingly. It was rarely his father praised him. And he felt hot all over at the thought that his father really considered him of use.

"All you need do is just to say so and so, you've got a brother anxious to get married—no, better say engaged—and he's chosen her, but he's afraid to propose himself, because he's half-witted. No, that won't do, though. Better praise him up a bit. You're a smart little beggar; you know how to manage it. Look at the money there, balancing just on the edge . . ."

The pale, over-wise-looking child glanced up and said, with a strange firmness in his delicate voice:

"Well, I suppose I'd better go, if nobody else will."

"That's the style, my son," said his father, pressing the cap down on his head.

Thereupon Egholm went into his dark-room. But he felt unable to work to-day. He fell to stalking up and down the studio impatiently. Everything seemed

to be in his way. Now he thrust the "Castle Window" aside, now he shifted the "Grecian Pillar." After a while he stepped out into the garden, and stood looking absently down into the lily bed. His glance wandered farther, up and down. Ah, a couple of tiles worked loose; better see to that at once.

He slips round the corner, picks up a long, thin pole, and tries to jab the tiles into place.

Then . . . Egholm all but fell insensible, as one of the tiles moved slowly aside and Sivert's grimy face and tousled hair appeared in the opening.

"Devil!" he shouted.

"Yes," answered Sivert humbly.

"*I'll* drive you out! Wrecking my house from threshold to roof!" He set the pole aslant against the wall, stamped on it till it broke, and, snatching up the shorter piece, rushed round into the house like one possessed.

Sivert realised that he would be caught like a rat in a trap. The imminent peril gave him unwonted energy and wit. Just as his father was scrambling up over the edge of the trap-door, Sivert burst bodily through the roof itself, scattering the tiles like fragments of a bursting shell. A moment later and he was sitting astride of the roof-ridge.

His father shouted at him with strange words, and waved the pole, but the shortened weapon would not reach. Down he went again to fetch the ladder from outside, and this time ran into his wife, who had come to see what had happened.

"What are you doing now—what's happening?" she asked in a trembling voice.

"Traitor!" cried Egholm, thrusting her aside.

But when Fru Egholm came out into the garden and

found her first-born seated where only sparrow and starling had been known to sit before, she turned giddy. She ran after her husband, caught him by the arm, and cried despairingly :

" Egholm, mark my words, if you kill the boy, you kill me too ! "

" You wait and see what I'll do ! " said Egholm bitterly, tugging at the ladder where it hung.

But Sivert the fugitive leaned back against the chimney-pot, largely at ease, and thrilled with the sweetness of his deliverance. He was out in the sun once more. The dark and dusty refuge he had chosen had grown unendurable of late. He knew, moreover, that the ladder would not help matters much, so there was no immediate peril. It was quite amusing, really, to see the pair of them down below quarrelling about him, while he sat there, inaccessibly above them, and master of his fate.

" Come up here and look at the view," he cried, with a giggle. " It's grand."

The sun-heated tiles were lovely and warm ; he could feel them through the seat of his trousers. He settled himself in an easier pose, combed his tangled hair with splayed fingers, brushed off the white and dust from his clothes here and there, and hailed again :

" Go and get the glasses, and if you see a greenish-looking man high up in the sky, it's me. But you'd better be quick before I get higher up still." Then, after a pause, he added :

" If I'm not in to supper, you can send me something to eat up here ! "

His father waved a threatening hand.

" You young devil—you shan't get out of this alive ! "

" Shouldn't stand under the eaves," said Sivert, with a grin. " Might come on to rain, you know."

Then a still more brilliant idea occurred to him. *He turned his back on them.* Forgot them, ignored them. What were they to him ? He devoted himself instead to attracting the attention of casual passers-by.

" Hey, Ditlev Pløk, look up here while I've got my feet off the ground, and see if my boots want soling. Oh, they don't, don't they? Well, they soon will, for I'm going to dance with various young ladies from the fancy drapery in the near future."

Ditlev Pløk was an old friend, and Sivert treated him as such. Wayfarers with whom he was not acquainted, he greeted with a respectful bow, having first drawn their attention to his perch by coughing loudly. Now, here was a fine lady coming, in a white hat. "*Ahem!*" Sivert raised his hat straight above his head, as if hoisting it on a flagstaff. The lady nodded, walked on a few paces, then stopped, and regarded the house intently. Sivert looked down abashed : it was Hedvig's mistress.

" Is Egholm at home ? " she inquired.

" Eh ? "

" I want to see Kasper Egholm, if he's not too busy."

" You'll find him round by the black-currants. Just round the corner—that way. I couldn't hear you at first, being so high up. The sound only gets as far as my knees, you know. Yes, you'll find him round the corner. And he won't be busy, no, not at all ! "

This last sentence Sivert himself found so amusing that he almost rocked himself off the roof. His father was most undeniably busy at the moment. His face was flushed far up over his bald pate. Every time he succeeded in getting the ladder up to the farthest point

it would reach, his wife clutched at it and dragged it down again with a crash.

"You dare do that once again," said Egholm, breathless and almost beside himself, "and I'll . . ."

She dared.

Egholm looked round thoughtfully, cold-bloodedly. He was looking for something—something important; he had had it a moment ago. Half of a broken pole . . . ah, there it was!

"You may strike me if you like, but you shan't touch the boy!" said Fru Egholm, clinging desperately to the ladder, as if resolved to keep it down, if need be, with her dead body.

Just at that moment some one came round the corner of the house, not a yard away—a lady.

Egholm was seized with a strange confusion. His hands trembled, as if it had been the Evil One himself before him. He hardly saw what she was like at all—saw only that she lifted the strands of honeysuckle aside with a daintily gloved hand. A strange customer to be coming to his studio, he thought. He set his pole up against the wall as carefully as if it had been a precious piece of apparatus. "I can leave it here for the present," he thought confusedly. Then, turning to his visitor, with a bow and a smile, but keeping his eyes averted, he said:

"This way, if you please. My studio is round the corner here. I will be at your service in one moment."

Fru van Haag understood his error, and purposely allowed it to continue. She could have her photograph taken and then go again—she had not announced herself yet. Yes, that was the best thing to do. For it was utterly impossible to make herself known to this man

and appear pleased at meeting him again His whole appearance disgusted her.

She drew a deep breath, and walked on ahead of him into the waiting-room.

" Brush and comb here, if you would like to arrange your hair a little," he said, pointing to some things under the glass. Next moment he was aware of his tactlessness, and tried to laugh it off, but only made matters worse, and, in his further confusion, caught his visitor by the arm, drew her into the studio, pointed to a high-backed chair, and disappeared. In a couple of seconds he was back again, arranging the curtains, and shifting the camera into place.

" Er — how would you wish to be taken ? " he inquired. " Half-length, or just the ordinary portrait ? I forgot to ask. Er—as a matter of fact, they generally leave it to me."

" Portrait, if you please."

" Yes, yes ; I think that will be excellent."

Fru van Haag sat in her chair watching him as he fussed about and ducked down under the green cloth.

She felt only disgust, and deep, almost humiliating disappointment at the sight of him.

Not a feature left, she thought, shaking her head. Those frayed sleeves hanging loose and empty at the wrists—why doesn't the man wear cuffs ? And his nails—with a mourning edge . . . ugh ! He ought to be ashamed. Even his head was deformed by the loss of his hair. That expanse of shivering nakedness on top was perhaps the worst of all. And then a fringe of ragged tufts, like an old man, round the ears and over his collar. . . . No, she could never forgive Kasper Egholm for having grown as hateful to look on as the fiend himself. She was incensed at this man for

having stolen the name of one she had known as a handsome lad, and her friend.

Hedvig was right.

And that woman, his wife, was no downtrodden specimen of the "ordinary." Fru van Haag could not get out of her mind one little thing she had noticed as she appeared without warning round the corner: Egholm's little wife had been down on her knees, pleading with uplifted hands. But the moment she caught sight of a stranger, she had bent down and started weeding without once looking up. It was enough to bring the tears to one's eyes to think of it.

And so it came about that pity for Fru Egholm won her to the thing her admiration for the Kasper Egholm of the old days had failed to accomplish. Just as Egholm had got his camera ready, and was casting a last critical glance at her pose, she rose to her feet, walked towards him, queenly proud, and said:

"I really only came to see you. I am Consul Steen's daughter from Helsingør."

Egholm turned sickly pale, but he went on fumbling with his apparatus, and said, without looking up:

"Consul Steen's daughter! I am very greatly honoured, I am sure. Yes—it is many years now. Yes. . . . Er, if you would not mind facing a *trifle* more that way . . . towards the door. . . ."

Fru van Haag took a step farther towards him, and said almost angrily:

"Really, you give me a strange reception, Kasper Egholm. I send you a message, which you do not answer, and now that I have come myself, you creep in under your green cloth and won't even shake hands."

Egholm stammered with difficulty:

"I never got your message, and I did not see your

hand. What am I to say, when I'm wishing all the time I were dead? What brought you here just now? You could not have come at a worse time."

"You struck her!"

"No. But I was just going to."

This remarkable frankness was disconcerting.

"But what on earth has she done?"

Egholm felt his case a thought less hopeless now. He was full of accusation against Anna. If he could only get it all said, then. . . . He explained that she had been keeping Sivert in hiding—against his will and knowledge. Stolen food for him all the time. And now, just when he had discovered it all, she came between them—thrust herself between the culprit and the punishment he deserved.

"Sivert? That was the young man up on the roof, then? But what had *he* done?"

Egholm was silent and dismayed. Here, face to face with this woman from another world, he saw things suddenly in a different light. All that had seemed natural, a matter of course, before, was now ridiculous, impossible. But he could not stand there speechless; he flung out one hand and began in a tense whisper to tell of his money affairs, his difficulties, how he had thought ". . . Petrea Bisserup, daughter of a wealthy brushmaker. . . ." But Sivert had upset all his plans for the marriage by hiding himself away. "And now, with the quarterly bills coming in . . ."

Fru van Haag felt herself overcome by a sort of mental dizziness. As long as she merely listened, Egholm's story was simply amusing, fantastic and unnatural as it was. But every time that she glanced at the man himself, with his downcast eyes and desperately furrowed brow, she realised that he expected her

to take it as bitter, tragic reality. In the end, she forgot her anger and disgust. She grasped his arm, as if to shake him back to his senses, and said, with unfeigned astonishment :

" Kasper Egholm ! Are you altogether mad ? "

" I—I dare say I am," he said hesitatingly. He felt himself at the moment as if he were awakening to something new.

VI

IT is generally agreed that the best way of getting properly into a story is to skip the commencement. Fru van Haag and Egholm decided to do so now. They sat here now, calling up memories gay and sad from the old days. Neither, apparently, had any recollection of a howling savage who had recently been discovered brandishing a broken rafter over the head of a woman on her knees. The woman herself had forgotten it. They had called her in, and she had shaken hands with Hedvig's mistress, after wiping her own hand many times on her apron. She had been working in the garden, she explained, and her hands weren't fit to be seen. Honoured and delighted, she stood smiling, and listened to the pair as they talked.

" Yes, it was a wonderful time," said Egholm. " The air seemed different altogether. And people, too. No poverty anywhere. Heavy silver things in every home. Thoroughbred horses in the stables. The Consul himself never drove with more than a pair, but his brother-in-law and several of the others always used four for best carriages."

" And the dinner-parties ! "

" Yes—and the garden-parties most of all. I remember one especially, when the garden was lit up all round with a hundred torches, flaming red and smoking."

" Yes, that was the time when the French warships were there."

" So it was, yes. Ah, that was a grand fête ! And I'd helped to make the torches myself, but I had to stay outside."

" Not all the time ! "

" Not all the time ? Did I come in, then ? Do you remember anything about it ? "

" Wasn't there some one who asked you to come in and gave you champagne ? "

" By the Chinese pavilion ? Was that then ? Oh, you called to me in the dark. Seen me stealing round, of course. And I remember you told Jespersen, the grocery assistant, who was looking after the wine, to pour me out a glass. His eyes went green with envy, but he had to when you said."

" Two glasses. One for you and one for me."

" One for you and one for me—yes," said Egholm. And for a moment he was lost in dreams that curved his lips to a smile. Jomfru Clara—Clara Steen that was—did *she* remember what came after ? How he had kissed her hand, beside himself with joy, and she had let him, but boxed his ears when he tried to draw her to him, and fled across the lawn like a fluttering moth. Oh, but it had been a sorrowful ending. And there was more besides. . . . He might perhaps venture to remind her of *that.*

" And your father found it out, and sent you over to Sweden for months. It was Kammerjunkeren's son that sneaked. I really believe he's the only creature I've ever really hated. A lanky, dried-up slip of a fellow."

Fru van Haag smiled strangely.

" You don't remember his name, then ? "

" No, I can't call it to mind. Wait a bit, though. Wasn't it van der Velde ? "

" Not a bad guess. Van Haag was his name."

" Oh, Egholm ! " cried Fru Egholm, flushing with shame.

But Fru van Haag whirled them both away with her irresistible laugh, and then went on, refreshed.

" I can tell you one thing," said Egholm, " that you never knew. I went to Sweden myself, to find you. It was a hard winter that year, and the Sound was frozen over. And I walked across one Sunday morning, and did get a sight of you, through a lighted window, late in the afternoon. It wasn't much of a result, but I was hugely pleased with it myself, and started back, and lost my way on the ice, and got frost-bite in my feet. For eight weeks I couldn't attend to my work in the shop. The Consul was angry enough as it was. But if he'd known what it was took me out over the ice that day, he wouldn't have kept me as long as he did. And that was only till next spring, when you came home."

" Poor Kasper Egholm," said Fru van Haag softly. She would have said more, but checked herself. For the first time during their talk she felt herself hampered by the fact that Egholm's little wife stood there, leaning her head over this way and that in her endeavour to take part in something that she felt she could not share. Now was the time for a tactful transition to the present, with the two principal parties once more firmly established as apart, each castled in their own wedded life.

Egholm came to her aid, saying, with a sigh :

" But the golden days are gone. We left the mansion of Consul Steen to go each our own way. You towards the sun, and I into the night. And we travelled round the world, to meet again in—Knarreby. You must have lived like a princess all the time. Your shoes, your silken dress have never been soiled by the dust of the

road. And here am I, a bald, old, worn-out man, living in a mud hut."

Fru van Haag said firmly :

" My dress is not silk at all. And as for calling your house here a mud hut, I never heard of such a thing. I've walked down this road three times just to look at the prettiest house in Knarreby. And then to find the man who lives there grumbling at the place—you ought to be ashamed of yourself ! "

Egholm felt a glow of pleasant warmth at her words. Still, he tried again :

" There's no proper foundation to the place ; it's just made of odd bits stuck together."

" You might say the same of yourself and me. But we're not expected to live for ever, are we ? Or take our houses with us when we die ? It's a house out of a fairy tale ! "

Egholm's delight flamed up rich and red at this. Here was his most secret thought uttered casually, as a matter of course, by this proud, beautiful woman, the love of his youth. All the scornful taunts that had been thrown at him by his fellows were flung back in their faces now. *The prettiest house in Knarreby* stood there, white and foliage-crowned, as he had dreamed.

He reached out blindly for her hand, but collided with his wife's, on the same errand. And Fru van Haag gave him her left with a smile. That, too, was a good, strong hand to hold.

Anna Egholm murmured something vaguely : Heavens, had she been standing all this time and never so much as asked what Fruen would take ? A little *Sylletøj*,[1] now . . .

Just as she left the room, Emanuel came rushing in

[1] Preserved fruit.

from the waiting-room. Looking neither to right nor left, he rushed up to his father's table, jumped on a chair, and slapped at the bracket; the 25 *Øre* fell into the cap he held in the other hand.

"It's mine now!" he said, with a smile and a firm little nod. Then his expression changed to one of hesitation and shyness on seeing there was a visitor.

"Go and say *Goddag* to the finest and loveliest lady in the world," said his father.

Fru van Haag kept the boy's little slender hand in hers, and looked at him with a smile full of kindly warmth.

"Was it your money?" she asked.

"No, not before. I was to have it when I came back."

"So you've been out on an errand for father?"

"Yes."

Emanuel sought his father's eye, but Egholm was looking straight ahead. Then it occurred to the lad that it would be a fine thing to appear as a hero in the sight of the finest and loveliest lady in the world—his father had called her so, and he had no doubt of it himself. With evident pride, he went on, "I've been out proposing to the ugliest girl you ever saw."

"Good heavens, child!—proposing? What do you mean?"

"Why, you see, Sivert didn't dare to, so father said . . ."

Egholm would have preferred to conceal Emanuel's intervention in the matter of Sivert's intended. Already Fru van Haag had asked him with insistent earnestness if he were mad. Would she now ask the same question again? To save the situation as far as possible, he put in now:

" You little stupid, Fruen will think you were asking on your own account. It was for Sivert, you know that quite well. Why don't you say so ? "

Emanuel was abashed at finding himself thus corrected. But Fru van Haag gave never a thought to the question of sanity. Such a delightful piece of absurdity could never have occurred at the Kgl. Toldbod that was her home. Nor had she ever in any place met with folk who brought up such extravagant ideas in perfect seriousness. She felt like jumping up and embracing this dilapidated, bald-headed man, out of sheer gratitude at finding anything so deliciously unconventional. She restrained herself, but took the boy on her lap, and commanded him to tell her the whole story from beginning to end. Emanuel needed no pressing. Without laughter, without claiming any complicity, he stood before her, eager only to relate as clearly and distinctly as he could. His innocence was complete. His pure childish breath fanned her cheek as he leaned forward to examine her brooch that had caught his eye.

Petrea's mother had made her assent conditional on Sivert's supporting her as well.

Egholm seemed little affected by the story. What did the maddest dreams matter, now that he was awake ?

Fru van Haag sat stroking Emanuel's hair.

Fru Egholm came in, bringing *Syltetøj* of various kinds on little plates. There was some gooseberry jelly that was only a year or two younger than Emanuel, and besides—a delicacy hardly to be found elsewhere, even at *Etatsraaden's* [1]—preserved wild strawberries. Fru van Haag was delighted, and Anna was overjoyed at her

[1] *Etatsraad*: a title literally "Councillor of State." Here, of course, indicating the most distinguished personage in the town.

praise ; the unwonted appreciation gave her confidence to speak out.

" Did you ever hear of such tomfoolery, sending a child on such an errand ? "

Fru van Haag laughed. " But what is the poor man to do, when Hr. Sivert is afraid to go ? "

" Well, he might go himself, or send me."

" Yes, you'd be a nice one to send," put in Egholm. " After pulling the ladder away just when I'd . . ."

" We'll forget all about that, if you please," said Fruen firmly.

" Yes. Yes, of course," said Egholm hurriedly.

" But when Sivert comes back again, you'll be just as wild as ever."

" Don't be too sure of that."

Fru van Haag saw how to manage it. Ah, but she was in her element now. Here was something to arrange, something that could be settled as she willed, not like the trimly ordered hedges of straight-clipped box in the Toldbod's prim little garden.

" Couldn't we have Sivert in now ? I should like to meet him."

" Well, if we could only get hold of him, but . . ."

" Why, isn't he up in the loft, then ? " asked Emanuel incautiously. He had been wondering what it was all about.

" Ho, so you knew all about it, too, you young rascal ? No, he's broken half the roof down and run away."

" Then he'll be under the old boat. He said if . . ."

" Go and fetch him," commanded Fru van Haag.

Five minutes later Emanuel returned. He had left the kitchen door open as he came in ; outside stood Sivert, clearing his throat and pulling at his thin, white moustache.

" Come inside, you ! "

And Sivert entered, straining every muscle in an attempt at dignity of carriage. His lips were compressed, his brow was sternly furrowed, but with all this he did not look impressive. The green suit had suffered considerably from having been worn day and night for several weeks. Without looking up, he walked as if led by some instinct straight towards Fru van Haag, and doubled himself up in a deep obeisance, nearly upsetting his balance in the process.

" Fruen wishes me to spare your life," said his father.

" I am deeply grateful for that," said Sivert, with stark solemnity.

" You don't know, I suppose, *who* this lady is ? "

" Yes, I do. And it's quite true what Emanuel said."

" What did Emanuel say ? "

" ' *Sitting there just like a duchess !* ' "

" Really," said Fru van Haag, flushing a little. " Then I suppose I ought to behave as such. Now, then ; each of you wish for something, please, and I'll try to fulfil it. Not too grand, if you please ; my duchy, I'm afraid, is only a modest one. You first, Little Mother—what would you like ? "

But Anna cannot think of anything to wish for. No, not a single thing . . . unless, perhaps, if Fruen could give them many such happy days as this. . . .

" Granted at once," says Fruen, stroking the little woman's cheek. " And Kasper Egholm, I suppose, would like a little *Herregaard* ? " [1]

" Or a big one ! "

" That will have to wait awhile, I'm afraid. But is there nothing else we could manage on the spot ? "

But no ; Egholm's imagination is so excited by the

[1] *Herregaard*: a country mansion.

one idea that, now she has mentioned it, he can think of nothing else. He feels he lacks but one thing in the world now—a country mansion. Fruen passes on to the next, which is Sivert. Sivert makes his peculiar bow once more, and, holding out one open hand, demands :

" Go to America ! "

As if he expected the stranger lady to write some charm then and there upon his palm that should make him an American. Perhaps the best solution, after all, thought Fruen to herself, and revised her opinion of the white-headed mannikin at once.

" You shall, then ! " she declares, and presses his expectant hand.

Emanuel blushed ; it was his turn now. And without waiting to be asked, he burst out with *his* wish :

" I'd like to be a priest ! "

" What terribly difficult things you all want," said Fruen sternly. But as Emanuel bowed his head and blushed hotter still, she went on, with a smile :

" There, there ; we'll manage it all right for you, too ! "

A little later, Fru van Haag rose to go. Egholm and his wife went with her across the " bridge," each being graciously accorded one of her hands, which they guarded as long as possible. It was as if the story of their life had turned suddenly to a new and wonderful chapter, in which every one lived happily ever after. Fru van Haag had a kindred feeling herself ; as if she were a poet, and had at last got to work upon something original.

Hedvig would marvel when she heard how the visit had turned out. And she should not be left out ; she should have her wish as well as the others. There could be little doubt about what she would choose : a man

with a big hat and a violin. And she should have him, too, as sure as Clara van Haag could help her. For that same Clara had learnt of life that lovers should be helped to win each other.

Walking thus occupied with her plans, she realised suddenly that she herself was filled with a sense of pleasure and well-being. She had not felt like this for years. And then, too, how the spring had suddenly come floating down from heaven these last few days! Hedges and gardens were scented already, even the grass itself. The woods were bright with greenery, the clouds above them gleaming white; even the waters of the Belt seemed fresher as they flowed and flowed.

Clara van Haag threw back her head, proudly feeling the weight of her rich chestnut hair, rejoicing to feel herself still young and strong. Here she was, walking with light step over the stones of Brogade. Entering happily into the house she had cleansed and aired. . . . True, there was still that living corpse sitting now, no doubt, in a corner of one of the rooms.

Never mind. There would be Hedvig in the kitchen—Hedvig with her eyes of crocus-blue. There—she was singing. Singing that eternal fragment of Malle Duse's. Ah, well, she and Hedvig would sing that corpse back into its grave again!

VII

FRU VAN HAAG guessed right: Hedvig wished for Johan Fors to come again, by day or by night, with his violin. She would not send him away again. But he did not come. He seemed to have disappeared altogether. When Hedvig had to go out buying cakes, she would put on her new hat and walk through Knarregade, Algade, and Søndergade, three whole streets. She might have made do with one, and that without a hat, for the baker's was only just round the corner. But Hedvig felt she could not; for in Søndergade there was a painter's. The door to the workshop stood open; Hedvig turned her head for a quick glance. Alas! there was no one there save the master, varnishing away at a dismal oak coffin.

Hedvig then discovered that, with all the painting and cleaning, they had forgotten the kitchen cupboards. And they needed doing badly, she explained.

"Oh, if you don't mind having all the mess about the place," said Fruen, "get it done, by all means. You can look in at the painter's and tell them to come."

"Wouldn't it be better if Fruen gave the order herself—any time Fruen happened to be that way?"

Hedvig thought it would look better that way.

Next day arrived a lad with pots and brushes. Hedvig looked at him with no small disdain, as a creature obviously useless for anything beyond painting. She did condescend so far as to ask him:

" Where's the man you had ? Gone away ? "

" Which one ? Johan Fors ? "

" Who else should I mean ? " said Hedvig carelessly. But the sound of the name had struck her, and she flushed.

" He's working at a *Herregaard* a little way out—Lundgaard, I think."

Now Hedvig would have given much to know if Johan went home every evening after his work, or what. But she could hardly ask. Instead, she went on :

" Isn't he the one that plays ? "

" Play ? I should think he can ! And heaps of things besides," said the boy, looking up with eyes alight with admiration.

Whereupon Hedvig refreshed that painter boy with coffee and cakes. In the evening, by some secret means, she obtained leave to go out at seven, and walked dreaming through the woods towards Lundgaard. Who could say . . . ? She sat down on a white bench where two roads met. Both led to Lundgaard, but involuntarily she decided that Johan must come by the broader, level main road. So she faced that way. Again and again she tried to fix her eyes on the dancing anemones or up towards the light green tops of the beeches ; a second after she was gazing once more along the curve of the road, where soon she began to fancy all manner of fantastic shapes. But none of them materialised into the living Johan Fors. She drummed on her white front teeth, and felt annoyed with herself at having thus to run with open arms to one who had paid her special attention in playing for her—one who had been not a little eager to come to her. But what did that matter after all, as long as it came all right in the end ? And if she asked his pardon in so many words, then . . . Hedvig's eyes

blinked with delicious tears. Yes, she would humble herself to him, though not to any other on earth.

Who was that coming . . . ? Alas, no ! only two trees crossing as she moved her body. Ugh, her neck was getting stiff. But—there he was ! No, only a gnat in front of her nose.

Should she say "*Du*" or "*De*" to him ? He had said *Du* without ceremony that night. If only she had accepted him, and let him play—what if it had set the Toldbod in an uproar. Fruen would surely have forgiven her when she heard how it was.

Now, as soon as he came in sight round the bend, she would get up and go to meet him. Not beg his pardon, of course, not that way. Not with her lips—not at all. She would laugh slantwise—so. Don't let's be stupid, Johan ; surely we're too good friends to waste time quarrelling about nothing !

Hedvig rose to her feet and held a little final rehearsal of the smile and the fling of her head that were to express all this.

"*Goddag,* Johan Fors"—it would hardly do to call him just "Johan"—and then stop still in front of him —so ! A couple of yards away. Now, try if you can get past !

Just then there came a slight sound, which Hedvig took to be the rustling of leaves, and gave no further heed. But as she stood there, laughing and play-acting in front of her imaginary Johan, Johan himself, alive and in reality, shot by on his cycle, coming from the narrow side-road. Hedvig turned, just in time to catch his eyes as he passed. Overwhelmed with shame, she literally collapsed. Had he nodded or not ? He could not raise his big hat anyway, for that was already fluttering in his left hand, which held it together with the

handlebar. Yes, his strong face had certainly brightened as he passed. But he had to avoid a deep rut just at that moment, so he couldn't make much of it.

Hedvig stepped out into the middle of the road and looked after him. His yellow mane streamed back from his head like the feathered head-dress of an Indian chief.

But suppose that smile of his had meant something quite different, after all?—suppose he had realised that she was standing there showing off on purpose? If not, why had he not stopped?

Hedvig walked disconsolately farther into the wood. The flowers seemed to lose their colour, the green of the beeches was dulled. And it was not because the sun was setting—not only that.

She walked on, careless of time and place, till she reached a slope overgrown with high bracken. A couple of partridges rose with a terrifying *whirrrr*. Hedvig looked round, and realised that she had lost her way. Ahead of her was a forbidding depth of pines; black night itself was prisoned there, like a wild beast in its cage. Now and again came a sound, as of heavy breathing, almost even a snarl. But she would not turn back. She dived forward into the dark, the fallen needles underfoot deadening all sound save the whisper of her dress.

There was a moment when the horror of the silent forest overcame her; she felt a dreadful death was lying in wait. She started to run. The branches snatched and tore at her with their stiff, bony fingers. The whole thing lasted hardly a minute.

"If I die, I shall never see him again," she thought. And the idea filled her with an indomitable desire of life. She would at least stay on the same earth with him.

And in a moment she was herself again. The sound she had heard—it must be the waves! In a minute or two she would come out on the shore—then it would be easy to find the way.

"It was *you* that helped me," thought Hedvig to herself as she reached the open strand. A little grey light still remained of the day; there was even a touch of red in the west, where the sun had gone down.

This is a relief, but her legs still tremble under her a little. And she has no strength left with which to meet a new shock to her nerves.

It comes in the shape of a vague black something a little distance off as she rounds a sloping bank. Something alive, rocking backwards and forwards in an uncanny, inexplicable fashion—something big and alive—a beast of some sort, or a human being. . . .

Hedvig comes to a standstill—her feet refuse to carry her farther.

The figure ahead towers higher now in the dark, turns towards her with a gleam of something white—a face . . . and utters a roar, a cry . . .

Hedvig makes no sound, but her eyes grow wider and her mouth hangs open.

"Who is there?"

And suddenly she realises that it is her father. She draws a deep breath between chattering teeth, and moves as if to pass by without a word.

"Who's that, I say? Why, what on earth . . . You, Hedvig?"

Hedvig marked how her father's voice changed from fear and fury to something like relief; she could not help turning and stopping.

"But—what on earth are you doing here?"

She was about to say she had lost her way. But her

father evidently cared nothing for any answer; he went on, coming up close to her now:

"Wait for me a minute, and we'll go together. Yes, do. There's no sense in going on being enemies. Come back with me just a few steps and I'll show you something. I feel I simply can't be angry with anyone now I've seen her—your mistress, I mean. Only fancy, she's just the same—the very same as when she was a child, or a young girl. . . ."

He gripped her by the arm and said, with eager feeling:

"Enviable creature! You — you have her near you every blessed day!"

Hedvig fixed her eyes on her father, but he simply stood there shaking his head in a sort of ecstasy; she could not read his face in the dark.

"What was it you were going to show me?"

"Ah yes, I forgot. Come here."

He drew her across to a point where the edge of the bank was drawn out into a kind of promontory; in daylight there would be a wide view to either side. She followed him, nervously and reluctantly, a few steps up; then he bent down, felt on the ground with one hand, and said:

"What do you think this is?"

"I can't see . . ."

"Bend down, then."

She did so, and saw that the earth had been dug up as in a series of long beds one above the other. It looked exactly like a doll's garden such as children make. Here and there little white stones were to be seen, further reminding her of childish decorations. She imagined that this queer father of hers had in a moment of weakness revealed a new phase of his madness; that he really came out here in the woods and played at

gardens by himself. She grew angry at the thought, but dared say no more than :

" Well, I don't know what it means, I'm sure."

Then said Egholm :

" This, Hedvig, is my place of sacrifice. Here I have prayed and sacrificed to God every single day, almost from the time I came to the town. Every day the same, whether in rain or wind, summer or winter. Here I have knelt many a Christmas Eve. Here I have suffered and striven. And each time, I have offered up a sacrifice to God—these little white, smooth stones. Stones are as precious in His eyes as gold. Nine smooth stones at least every time. Here they are, lying in rows up the slope. Look at them—loads and loads of them. Twenty or thirty thousand stones."

Hedvig was touched. Here was her father talking so kindly, showing her with a sort of modest pride the results of his work. *Herregud*, such pains he had taken over it, and for all that he stood there in his wretched clothes, hat in hand, like any humble mendicant. But it was only for a moment. She crushed the rising pity firmly back. Years and years of humbug ! Thirty thousand pebbles stuck into the ground one by one. No, they had not softened the heart of God—they should not soften hers !

" And what have you got out of it all in the end? " she asked harshly.

" *Fru van Haag has come!* " he answered. And Hedvig saw how his face turned heavenward as he spoke.

" Did you pray for her, then ? "

" No, never ! Nothing of all that I prayed for has ever been fulfilled, but since God has granted me this great joy, it shows He must have appreciated my good will. And from now onwards, I shall pray no more.

Only give thanks and make thank-offerings. He knows much better what is best for me. You see, it will all come right now that she is here."

They walked on together into the town. Egholm stepped as confidently in the dark as by day; he had trodden the path a thousand times. When they passed a streamlet, he reached out a hand to help her. This was a change, indeed! Haha! perhaps he was in love!

As if reading her thought, Egholm answered the question in her mind at once.

"I look on her as a saint—yes, a saint. And I believe she can work miracles. 'Wish!' she said. And I wished for a country house. And you see I shall get it!"

Hedvig may have smiled a little at this. But she, too, looked up to her mistress with unbounded admiration.

Her father walked with her as far as the Toldbod. This was the first time they had ever spoken together as two human beings.

"Good-bye," he said, and stood watching her as she went in.

Once on the stairs, Hedvig fell back to her own gloomy thoughts once more. She seemed to understand now that every one else might be happy—every one but she herself. When she reached her room, she threw herself down on the bed in tears. Then she heard a light step in the passage outside.

"Hedvig—just a minute. It's me."

It was Fruen's voice. Hedvig opened the door.

"Matches—have you a box of matches? I like to have them ready, in case . . . No, Hedvig, I'm telling stories. The matches were there all right—I hid them under my pillow. I'm waiting for him to go to bed. He's such a sight when he's undressing. And it always

takes him half an hour. I've never got used to it yet, though I've been married all these years. He's dreadful without his collar, and worse still without his trousers. . . . Oh, I ought not to talk like this to you, child. But when he goes over to the washstand—as if it were the most natural thing in the world . . . Hedvig, may I sit here just for twenty minutes? Where have you been all the evening, child? Out with your *big* man with the hat? Let me see if you look happy. But, good heavens, child! . . . Crying . . . ?"

Then Hedvig told her all about Johan. Fruen was in her nightdress; she crept up into Hedvig's bed and listened without a word. The light of a lantern out on the quay found its way to her great brilliant eyes. Then, when Hedvig had ceased, she said calmly and decisively:

"He shall be your sweetheart."

"But how?" asked Hedvig simply.

"He will come of his own accord, and then you simply say no! That's the way."

"But—but that's what I did last time."

"Ah, but next time he'll take you in spite of your no!—that is, if he's the man we think he is."

"Shall I run after him, then . . . I mean . . ."

"Not a step!"

Hedvig felt relieved. The light from the quay shone on her white teeth. She told of her meeting with her father in the grey of the wood; of his sacrificial grove. And she repeated his words about her mistress—a saint that could work miracles, and would get him his wish as she had said. . . .

"Oh . . . did he say that?" murmured Fru van Haag softly. And the lantern rays gathered in a single glittering drop that slipped down over her right cheek. A little after she rose to her feet, and said:

" I've been such a useless wretch. And now, here in Knarreby, to rise beyond all I've ever been before. First a duchess, then a saint. But, as true as there's blood in my veins, I'll be something, do something, for you all ! "

Fru van Haag went back to her room, and slipped silently into bed. Her husband lay there close by, wearing the apparatus he had bought in Berlin to keep his moustache in place. His hands were folded piously in front of him on the clothes, as it might be an old woman. She could not help laughing—and it struck her suddenly that she had never laughed before—not at him.

But—why not look at him like that ?

And in a little while she was busy with bright thoughts undisturbed.

A country mansion—Holy orders—a passage to America—and a painter man with a big hat. . . . It was not so easy to manage it all, but . . .

VIII

TWO months passed. Generally speaking, little happens in Knarreby in two months. But the rule has been set aside since Fru van Haag came to the place. Scarcely a day but she herself does something new and remarkable.

Yesterday she stopped a runaway horse. To-morrow she is going to a christening at—no, not *Etatsraaden's*, but—the lamplighter's. What she will do to-day, Heaven only knows. See, here she comes, walking along—dancing along, one might be tempted to say—down the street, dressed without any particular smartness. Not even gloves on, no going-out things at all, beyond her big white hat.

Now she stops outside the "Fancy Drapery Establishment," as Lund the draper loves to call his shop. The window displays three mantles hung on stands. Fruen casts a casual glance at them.

But little Lund buzzes round inside like a frantic bluebottle behind the window.

Heavens alive! If only he could get *her* for a customer!

He rushes to the desk, and next moment Fru van Haag sees his little podgy hand stealing in from behind among the mantles, pinning a ticket on the ugliest:

"*Latest fashion.*
Reduced Price: Kr. 52.97."

Fruen raises her eyebrows and walks on. But Lund dashes out on to the steps and hails her breezily :

" Lovely day ! "

She turns her head and looks him up and down, reducing him to the limpness of a rag. But for all his inward abasement, he manages to sustain an outward smile.

" Lovely day ! " he says again, thinking to himself : Never mind. At any rate, she's stopped.

" I noticed," he goes on, " that Fruen was looking at my windows. I fancied, indeed, with some slight interest. As a business man, you know—practised eye —spot that sort of thing at once. Now, if Fruen would like to have a look round the stock ? I've heaps of things besides those in the window. *Heaps.* The brown one there, now, next to the one you were looking at—I would let that go for 42.82."

" No, thanks. I don't think . . ."

" Oh, I wasn't pressing—wouldn't think of it. Only too delighted to have people look at my things. People of *taste,* that is. People who know what's *chic.* And there aren't many of that sort in Knarreby, hehe ! "

Fruen hesitated ; she felt to-day she could not bear to hurt the meanest worm. And Lund's eager little business eye discerned it ; he needed only to step aside and say, " *Værs'god, værs'god !* " [1] And with a sigh Fru van Haag entered in.

" I ought to mention, we've just got the new season's things in. Some first-rate things in full-length coats, for instance. All prices. That one there on the left, now ; only 45. The one you were looking at, of course, is the finest—the acme of taste, *chic* and

[1] *Værsaagod :* answers approximately to " Allow me " or " Please to . . ." Used also when offering or handing anything.

fashionable—the sort of thing they wear in Copenhagen."

Lund made a leap and snatched the *chic* and fashionable thing through the window, thrusting it then with eagerness towards his patron *in spe*.

"Well, no, to tell the truth, I don't really care about it."

Lund was shocked. His face turned suddenly serious, and he stepped back a pace as if to see what possible objection anyone could have to *that*. Surely nothing had been spared to make it as *chic* and fashionable and acme-of-tasteful as could be? The very architecture of the thing was turned and twisted according to the demands of the leading fashion journals, and as for the trimming—it bordered on extravagance. Collar and pockets and sleeves were set with buttons in rows as close as on the cards in his drawer; here and there were tassels dangling. No, really, it was unreasonable—but there was no end to what some people expected for their *Kr.* 52.97. Lund cast a lover's glance at the little triangular slip of magenta-coloured silk at the points of the collar on either side. Hadn't she noticed those? And then the ornamental work—in gold and silver and peacock—surely . . .

"The postmaster's lady herself was looking at that very one, and said it was charming," said Lund, watching to see what effect this announcement would make. What? None at all? Very strange. . . . He went on:

"And very reasonable, too, she thought."

"Yes, yes, very reasonable, no doubt."

"But perhaps it's the shape you don't care for?"

"The shape—yes—no, I don't care much for that shape. But I think you said you had some others? One can't like everything, you know."

"Let me get the two others from the window. . . ."

"No, thank you, really. I saw them from outside."

Lund was inwardly furious by now. Save for those three, his stock consisted only of the same everlasting uniform ugliness that country people preferred. The three on show represented his selection for the town, and here was this impertinent minx from Heaven-knows-where turning up her nose at them all! What did she know of *chic* fashions and taste? He'd teach her a lesson! And as if to himself, he went on:

"Oh, they're not wearing that sort of thing now with the straight front. Full bosom, that's all the rage now. And short jackets, too—they're done with long ago. Half-length it is now."

Fru van Haag's expression changed slightly. She realised that this little man had formed in his mind a correct picture of that short, white jacket of hers—and now she came to think of it, she had bought that jacket over a year ago, in Brussels.

Lund marked the look in her eyes, and, nodding to himself, returned to the attack.

"No, never see that sort of thing nowadays. 'Tisn't worn in Copenhagen—or anywhere else. The traveller told me himself—H. P. Sørensen, it was—I don't know if you know him? No? Well, he told me. 'Yes,' he said, 'I know you, Lund; you always want the best and smartest that's going.' That's what he said. He always says so. Oh, he knows me, does Sørensen. And between you and me, Fru Haag—Fru van Haag, I mean, beg pardon—I was thinking of you when I picked out that one there. You'll have the smartest coat in the place; there's not another like it in the town. I say 50.95, to you. You've a charming figure, Fru van Haag. It would be a credit to the business."

Womanlike, Clara had long since forgotten how and why she had come into the shop. Here she was, *in* a shop, and she felt it her duty to buy something.

"But really, I couldn't take that dreadful thing there."

Lund was gentleness and subservience itself now; he felt he was gaining the day.

"No consequence at all," he said. "Don't mention it. We'll pick out another from the catalogue. I've a whole stock of coats, as I said, just through at the back here. Sørensen, he knows where to send his things. But—well, they're not properly unpacked yet, and hardly the thing for you, anyway. I can't understand you don't care about this one here, though—with all that lovely trimming—why, it's marvellous value. The trimmings alone must come to eight or nine *Kroner* to begin with. The postmaster's lady, she was charmed with it, as I said. Ordered one in the same style on the spot. . . ."

"Fru Weisz ordered one?"

"Yes, I'm expecting it by to-morrow's boat. She wanted it a couple of inches wider in the body—not having your slenderness about the corset, Fru Haag."

Fru van Haag felt as if she had escaped a mortal peril. The thought of dressing twins with anyone made her shiver. But when Lund brought out his catalogues and began turning the leaves, she felt as helpless as a small bird under the eye of a cobra. She stood there staring confusedly at the plates, until at last, discovering one that did not positively hurt, she pointed a trembling finger and said that would do.

"Ah, 'The Olivia,' yes. Olivia. I'll write for it this evening—it'll be here by Saturday."

" But I want it with straight pockets, please, and straight fronted."

" Altered as you please," said Lund. He took a piece of paper and noted down : " Olivia. Straight pockets, no full bosom."

" That's the way, then ? "

" Yes, thanks. . . ."

The material and buttons were then settled. Lund laid his paper aside—that was *that* deal over—and said :

" You're an acquisition to the town, Fru Haag. Yes, indeed, I mean it. It's hardly too much to say so. We're delighted to have you in our midst. We're always talking about the good you do in secret. It's beautiful. Now there's that lamplighter, for instance, that comes up to your house every day and gets loaded up with food. Isn't that a beautiful thing to do ? And then that boy of Egholm's, Sivert, that you paid a passage for to America out of your own private income, in spite of your husband going against it all he could—in the nicest way, of course."

" Who—who on earth dares to go thrusting their nose into my affairs ? " said Fru van Haag angrily.

" Thrusting ? Well, you can't help it, you know, when it's thrust right *under* your nose by every one that comes into the shop. Now there's the policeman —I say to him, ' Why weren't the lamps alight last night ?—Because Mikkelsen was drunk.—And why was Mikkelsen drunk ?—Because Fru Haag's promised him free gratis dinner every day for him and his wife and nine children ! ' And then about Sivert. How can people help knowing, when you go round to Egholm's yourself two and three times in a single week ? First time—and the second, perhaps—we thought you were

just going to be photographed like anybody else. But then Fru Hermansen comes along and tells how you and Egholm were children together—in the nicest way, of course. And I said it was all to Fru Haag's credit : those were my words. And that's why I said to Sørensen, send me that one with the tassels among the window selection ; that'll be for Fru Haag. Sørensen and I, we're friends ; we know each other. When he started, I was head assistant. And now he's making his twelve thousand *Kroner* a year. Ah, well . . . ! "

Lund sighed at the distance between his own poor existence and that of H. P. Sørensen, travelling at twelve thousand a year. That sigh proved his salvation. Fru Clara's eyes flashed lightnings ; in a moment she would stamp this miserable little area sneak under her heel and go. Then all at once she saw the sordid poverty of the man. It was the pride of his life to be able to claim friendship with a commercial traveller. It was food and drink to him to glean some scraps of gossip about other people's lives. It was a red-letter day when he sold a cheap little jacket. No doubt he had a struggle to make ends meet. She had been in the shop now for nearly half an hour, and not another customer had entered in the time. He had not even a shop assistant . . . poor little man !

She let him go on, and he went on, all unsuspecting, gossiping happily, his eyes glittering behind his glasses as he talked. He enjoyed his own eloquence, and believed he had found an admiring hearer. Oh, he knew that women one and all loved flattery.

" Sivert, of course, I know. Known him for years. I was to have had him in here to learn the business at one time. Only, he hadn't the education. But that, of course, doesn't matter in America. Dollars—that's all

they care about there. At 3.75 in Danish money. Now Egholm's youngest—what's his name?—Emanuel, he'll get all the education he wants, now you've put him to school at your own expense. Hehe!"

"Really, Hr. Lund, you seem to know everything. I suppose you can hear the grass grow, now, can't you?"

But Lund laughed triumphantly. "I hear a good deal, of course. As for hearing the grass grow, that's more than anybody can, seeing it makes no noise. But, you see, when Fru Egholm comes in to buy a jacket with brass buttons for the boy, why, naturally I say to myself: now what does he want a jacket with brass buttons for? And then, why, as a man of business, you know, the rest's easy. I let that jacket go for 8.90. On credit—but what does that matter? I don't look down on a man because he runs into debt; it's the people that never buy anything, they're the worst. And, anyhow, he's always got the boat, if it came to that."

"Eight *Kroner* ninety, you said?" Fruen took out her little flat grey purse. "Write it off as paid, will you?"

"Now, isn't that noble?" said Lund, fluttering eagerly through the leaves of his cash-book. "But I will say, Egholms are worth it. First-rate people. I don't mind saying I took an interest in the family myself at one time."

"You?" said Fru van Haag. She had been on the point of leaving, but now she stopped once more.

"Yes," said Lund, nodding with a satisfied air. "It was the time when he went about inventing that steamboat thing of his. I *warned* him. You leave it alone, I said. And I suppose I was the only one that said as much. That's what you call foresight. And then, sure

enough, the whole thing was burned up to nothing—pst ! And it vanished. Hehe ! "

" It was dreadfully hard for him, poor man."

" Noble and generous again ! I felt the same myself at the time, I remember. Yes, I think I can fairly say I've done a good deal for the Egholms. When he built that abominable rabbit-hutch of his, people said it was a disgrace to the town, and ought to be forbidden. I simply said let him ! It won't be a disgrace after all, but a sight for tourists. Tourists they like that sort of odd thing. And we've three great attractions for tourists here. There's the *situation*, to begin with. And then the *church* and then the *hutch*—that's what they call Egholm's place now. Did you know we were going to have tourists here, Fru Haag ? Yes, next summer. There's a little clique of us have joined in, to take over Vang's hotel and let it out to summer boarders. It was my idea. I discovered the situation. I've heard people say Knarreby was prettier than Copenhagen and Skagen together. More situation about it, that's all. What do you think of it, Fru Haag ? "

Fru van Haag said she knew nothing about tourists, and did not care. She was moving again to the door, when Lund stopped her by the simple process of getting in her way, and rapped out at a furious rate :

" I think we shall get them all right. You see, they'll come. And they'll be all dressed up, you can be sure, and make our own people here look to their things a bit. Who is there in the whole of the town now that troubles about their dress ? Not a soul, except the postmaster's lady. Ah, Fru Weisz, she's a lady that knows how to dress ! You ought to see her in the winter, with her furs on—loaded up with them, ready to sink under the weight of them. And that's the truth. Now,

how are you off for furs, Fru Haag ? I'm sure it would be a shame for a lady in your position to be outshone by a postmaster's wife."

" I've nothing much in the way of furs, I'm afraid."

" Ah ! Well, now, I *have*," said Lund, and fairly jumped. " Just let me show you a lovely evening fox I've got here—quite cheap, too. Got it lying over by the merest chance."

" Not now, thank you," said Fru van Haag. She was growing positively afraid of this little brown spider.

" No, no, of course, no hurry. Not the season for furs just at present. But summer blouses, now ? I've a simply first-rate selection ? If you'll wait just one second I'll show what I can do in blouses. You've no idea . . ."

" No, really, no, thank you. Don't trouble . . ."

" There ! " cried the little man, tearing down a cascade of cardboard boxes. *Crêpe de chine*, 7.35. Tartan, half-silk. I think we shall be able to give them a lead this year. In blouses especially. Look at this, now, for 6.85. They're moving the railway station, you know. The railway people want to buy up Egholm's house and the bit of ground there for the new buildings, but *we* don't want it that way at all. No, we're going to get the railway right away from that quarter of the town, and the new station buildings in Kongeskoven—have to expropriate that, of course. That is to say, *Kammerherren* will have to sell whether he likes it or not. That's our idea. What do you think of this, now—pale mauve, with the youthful collar ? "

" No. I don't like any of them. What was that about the railway station ? When were they going to move it ? "

"As soon as the grant's approved by the State. Next year, we hope. But these blouses, now—that's the sort of thing for a real lady. See them in the highest circles. Even a common servant girl 'll have two or three of them to change with."

"Thanks, thanks. . . . But you mean they would cut down half the trees there, in Kongeskoven, to make room for a railway station? They'd have to, of course."

"Only a bit of it. Not a tree beyond what's strictly necessary. Wouldn't do to spoil the situation, you know. Ah, my mistake. I thought it was blouses. By the way, now I've got it down, is there anything in underlinen, now? This sort of thing . . . ?"

"No, thank you. I think my linen will do very well for the present. I'm afraid I must go now. I hope I haven't given you too much trouble."

Lund flung his cardboard boxes aside and stepped out from behind the counter.

"Trouble? Not a bit of it. Only too delighted! But—now I think of it—there's different *sorts* of underlinen, you know. Lace edging, for instance—never worn now. A light frill, gathered so. And knickers slightly more open at the knee."

Fru van Haag was already in the street. But she felt as if the little draper's business eye saw clean through all she had on. A shudder of disgust passed through her, but she found no words to fling in his face. Instead, she said apologetically, with a blush:

"Oh, but really, I have some besides the lace, Hr. Lund. It's only my big trunk that went astray. But they've found it all right now, and I shall have it here soon."

Lund retired into his shop, pale with the effects of his excitement. He passed one hand through his hair,

which had grown thin and grey the last few years. Gradually, however, he recovered and, going to the back door, called up the stairs :

" Minna, Minna ! "

There was the sound of a door opening above, and a shrill voice hailed down : " Yes ? "

" Did you see her—Fru Haag ? "

" Yes. Did she take it, after all ? "

" No ! She wasn't up to it. No taste at all. Took a miserable little thing fit for a servant girl. So you can have the one with the trimmings now."

Minna advanced as far as the stair rail, so that her legs were visible from below. Good heavy legs they were, twice as bulky at least as little Lund's. Her feet were encased in blue slippers with swansdown edging.

" Was it an alpaca she chose ? "

" No—white frotté. ' Olivia,' with rounded buttons, straight pockets, and belted at the back. She wouldn't have the full bosom at any price."

" And what about Egholm's account. Did you ask her ? "

" She offered to pay it herself before I'd said a word. So there must be something fishy there. Anyhow, I'll mark that one in the window ' Sold,' and you can have it whenever you like."

" I want to have a look at that ' Olivia ' first."

" Lord, girl, don't be a fool ! I tell you, the thing's ages out of fashion ; flat as a door in front."

" You leave it to me. You've no idea of individuality. And seeing I keep myself, you've no call to . . ."

The slippers disappeared, a door slammed, but a little later came the sound of singing from above, testifying to Minna's excellent health and spirits.

Fru van Haag felt a trifle ashamed of herself as she

walked home. She had but a vague idea of what the thing would look like when she got it. There would hardly be much left of " Olivia " after the alterations, but perhaps it might make up into something like the little Brussels jacket, which was really what she had been thinking of when the spider man began. Well, well . . .

But what was that he had said about the railway ?

Fru Clara stood still in the middle of the street and nodded to herself.

Yes . . . *that* was the way to manage it !

If the railway took over Egholm's little property, it would bring him in a nice little sum. Properly used, it might form the key to his dearest wish. . . .

Fru Clara nodded again and went on her way.

She might put in a word with the Minister. . . .

Passers-by in the street greeted her with respect. But those within doors, watching from behind windows and curtains, shook their heads and said :

" Look at her showing herself off like that in the open street ! "

IX

FRU VAN HAAG again ! Her name was whispered and cried about from house to house. Yes, she had discovered some old paintings on the walls of the church. It was true. Borrowed the key and looked the place over from end to end. Clambered up on a chair-back and . . . well, there the paintings were, hidden away under endless coatings of whitewash. A wonderful person was Fru van Haag.

The priest brought the matter to the notice of the proper authorities, with a suggestion that these relics of ancient art—naïve, no doubt, yet beautiful in their way—ought to be worth restoration.

The authorities thought not, seeing that the restoration would cost money.

But Fancy-Drapery Lund, hearing of the matter, runs his fingers through his hair, and conceives an idea that makes his eyes glitter : the tourists !

Minna is ordered down to attend to the shop, while Lund runs about from one to another of the " clique " and the more important townsfolk generally.

" The tourists ! " he whispers. " Tourists like a church with a bit of colour. Plain white's out of fashion now. Wall-painting's all the rage—you should see the pictures they've got at Viborg, or the *Raadhus* at Copenhagen—that's not a church, of course, but still, it's got a tower. They all go in for coloured things nowadays."

And the magic word, " *Tourists*," proved of such

power that it opened not only the hearts, but the purse-strings.

Nobody really believed in the tourist business, but all pretended they did. They formed societies and syndicates for the exploitation of tourists. They built bathing establishments, even summer villas, for their accommodation. They suffered Egholm's house to remain, and brightened up their church with costly painting-work. All with a cheerful smile on the lips and a deep distrust in their hearts.

Who was to do the painting in the church ? None could be long in doubt about that : who but the man of marvels, the painter Johan Fors ?

Hedvig saw in the paper that his name had been mentioned at a meeting of the Town Council. She took a bread-knife, cut out the paragraph, and hid it carefully in her chest of drawers.

When the work in the church began, there came an exciting time for Hedvig. She knew now that he was to be found up there just opposite, behind the thick red walls. She wished they would turn transparent to her eyes. Several times a day she found occasion to pass by the church, and now and then managed to catch a glimpse of her Johan. She was easily contented where Johan Fors was concerned. She came home with cheeks flushed feverishly the first morning she had seen him standing outside by one of the ivy-covered tombs. His painting-smock was spotted all over in every hue, mostly about the pockets, and least between the shoulder-blades, where, of course, it was not so easy to wipe one's fingers. There was a belt to the thing, and the ends hung down on either side.

Later that day Hedvig had another experience, even more exciting than that of the morning.

She was out on errands again, and, on the stroke of twelve precisely, Johan stepped out from the church door, locking it after him, and putting the big key in his pocket. They met just outside the gate. He lifted his chin and saw her, and, when she nodded, off came his broad-brimmed hat with a flourish, and a smile came waving to her from his lips and eyes. It even seemed as if his hair, all gleaming in the sun, was smiling too.

On the following Sunday Hedvig asked for leave to go out. She wanted to go to church. Fruen said yes, but looked at her with such an expression of surprise that Hedvig blushed.

Hedvig went in early. She could see there was some scaffolding up on the north wall, where a red and green frieze had been commenced. At first she took up her place just under the scaffolding, but before long realised that this was the worst thing she could do, and moved accordingly over to a seat on the opposite side. She walked with her proudest air, fancying every soul in the church could see she had chosen a spot from which she could study Johan Fors' scaffolding all the time, and anxious to impress them.

By the time the first hymn had begun, she was already feeling acute discomfort from keeping her neck screwed round. No, this was ridiculous; she pulled herself together and took a survey of the congregation. They had stepped quietly past on the cocoanut matting along the aisle, and clattered into their seats without her having noticed a single one. Right in the front she could see *Kammerherren*, with his bull-dog face, and a few stiff and starched old ladies from Gammelhauge. Immediately behind was Hedvig's own respected master. She could see the marks of the moustache-band on his cheek and some irregularly dyed patches in his hair. Well,

that, she could safely say, was his own fault. *She* at any rate could be sure there was never crease nor speck on his clothes, nor a dull spot on his boots. She could not see his eyes from where she sat, but she felt sure they were staring like two empty gateways, not even looking in any fixed direction. But his red ears caught every sound far or near.

In the same pew sat Postmaster Weisz and his little over-dressed wife. Hedvig knew practically everybody in the church, and those in the front pew were folk she had been brought up from a child to look on with respect. But of late her mistress had considerably shaken this traditional reverence. And her eyes now had not always the dull look of humble regard for her " betters " ; she turned up her nose at her master himself, and made a face at Ironfounder Rothe. It was this last jovial personage of whom her mistress had declared that the rolls of fat at the back of his neck looked like a grin seen from behind. And Hedvig discovered that it was true.

There was her friend, Old Poulsen, with his chronic stoop, singing away in his humble corner, and screwing at his cuffs the while.

After the hymn came a prayer. Then Hedvig heard voices that she knew, and, turning her head, perceived her parents and Emanuel whispering anxiously together and unable to fix on a place. They waited till the prayer was over, and then sat down at the back.

At the last verse of a hymn the priest appeared like a ghost in the pulpit and surveyed his flock. He was a handsome man ; Hedvig felt a soft, childlike feeling in her breast as his whispering voice began. He had large, deep eyes that seemed to take in the whole of the congregation at once. But when he paused for breath

the first time, he looked up, turned his glance to the right, and looked long at something there ; Hedvig looked the same way, and lo, it was Johan's scaffolding he was looking at.

It was an unforgettable day for Hedvig. Johan and his work rose to a giddy height in her esteem. There —there was Rothe himself craning his bull-neck backward, and little Draper Lund polishing his glasses to get every detail in. He coughed importantly, and nudged his daughter Minna ; it was *his* doing that the scaffolding was there at all !

At last there was hardly a worshipper in the church but was looking the wrong way up at this new hanging altar. The few exceptions were His Excellency from Gammelhauge, Toldforvalter van Haag, and Hedvig's father.

When the sermon was over Hedvig had to go. She nodded to her mother and Emanuel as she passed, but her father did not see her ; he was sitting with folded hands and an expression of transcendent bliss upon his face.

Day and night Hedvig's thoughts were of Johan. She lived in one long ecstasy. His scaffolding had been shifted ; he was working now on one of the high, small-quartered windows. From her bedroom and the other rooms facing that way she could see his smock as he moved. Now and again she even caught a glimpse of his sunburned face, and his fair, viking hair bending forwards towards the window, but when this happened she drew back, dazzled. She came no nearer to him these days ; only now and again she was rewarded by a flourishing wave of his big hat, when she chanced to pass by the church at the proper time.

Then, one day at the beginning of August, when the light nights had moved farther to the north, her mistress

came rushing in one evening to Hedvig's bedroom, and gasped out :

" He's playing ! "

Her voice was as excited as if she had said the house was on fire. Hedvig caught the infection in a moment ; she jumped out of bed, and though it was months now since they had spoken of Johan, she simply asked :

" Where ? "

" In the church—listen ! "

They went to the window, and as soon as their ears had got the range, a thread of melody span itself out through the darkness, joining the three together. Only for a moment ; then the two listeners could no longer be sure if it was music they heard, or only the rushing of blood in their ears.

" Come ! " cried Fruen, gripping Hedvig firmly by the wrist.

The child was almost going as she was, in her night attire, but came to herself sufficiently to break away and hurry into some clothes.

" Wait—oh, wait for me," she entreated, like a child, as Fru Clara, impatient, moved as if to go.

As soon as they were outside the house, said Fruen :

" We must climb up the slope—the gravel makes such a noise."

Hedvig nodded, and the two started off up the bank, clambering in between elder bushes and stinging nettles till they reached the church wall. Already they could hear Johan's violin at work inside, but it was not till they reached the door in the western porch that they could make out any connected melody. Here they could safely stand and listen : Johan would hardly have more than one key to the door at the other end. Hedvig was trembling with excitement. There was something

so deliciously thrilling in standing here almost inside the gloomy church by night, and hearing sounds issuing from within. For, after all, who could say that it was Johan inside there, playing in the dark? Ah no, it could not be; it must be some ghost or other, haunting the place. Surely no living hand could bring forth such strange music as this? And what living being would ever dare to go all alone into the dark church by night? The corpses in their graves would rise and wreak a dreadful vengeance on any such intruder. Hedvig could almost see the tombstones tottering, and Shapes in ghostly, mouldering grave-clothes gripping with skeleton fingers about his throat. . . .

She pressed close up to her mistress, and wished for a moment she were safely back in bed. But then came Fruen's voice close in her ear, reassuringly clear and firm:

"The fellow plays quite decently, I declare!"

Hedvig forgot her fear in a moment under the influence of her lady's calmness and strength.

"He's trying these runs over—can you hear? It's a curious sort of music, though. Like a bird soaring up and up towards the sun, then suddenly losing all its strength and dropping to earth. There—now it's up again! He's powerful; hark at the rustling of his feathers now! Who were his parents, do you know?"

"His mother died years and years ago. His father died only a year or so ago, over in Sweden. He was a basket-maker, but he used to play a lot. He got the violin from a great musician somewhere, and Johan had it when he died."

The melody had changed now. Rik-rik-rik. Trak-trakk-erak-erak. Rik-rik-rik. Trak-trakkerak.

"Listen—dancing in wooden shoes. Fancy the

cheek of the man, though—doing a barn-dance in church." Fru Clara's voice was stern, but she fell to dancing lightly as she spoke, so it could hardly have been seriously meant.

" There—that's enough of that. Now the next ! "

It almost seemed as if Johan had heard. He broke off, and began tuning his violin.

Any remains of fear that Hedvig might have cherished were dispelled by the sober and commonplace tones of Johan's tuning up. She could not help laughing inwardly at the idea of Johan's sturdy figure standing there unmoved, as if at his work by day on the scaffolding, tuning his violin. Surely no other man in the world was possessed of such diabolical, cold-blooded calm.

And Hedvig almost choked with pride at having Fru van Haag, unquestionably the finest lady in the town, standing out here and listening enthusiastically to her Johan's music.

" Oh, I know that ! " cried Fruen, as the disturber of the peace commenced again. " That's Liszt. Heavens ! Wherever did he learn *that* ? Lovely ! "

Hedvig never doubted but that the musician in there could play anything you pleased.

" Hey, stop ! That's all wrong ! What are you up to now, Master Johan ? Oh, the man's spilling a horrible paint-pot over the loveliest work of art ! Fie, Johan Fors ! "

Hedvig felt shamed and insulted on Johan's behalf, but what could she say ? She did not know the piece he was playing—to tell the truth, she did not even think it nearly as good as the rest.

" Come along—I can't stand any more of this. It's supposed to be Liszt, but he's messed it all up with tassels and trimmings like one of Lund's abominable

mantles. Oh, he's stopped—thank Heaven for that! Let's see what he'll play next."

But Johan did not play anything next. The next thing they heard was Johan's footstep, first on wood, then ringing on stone flooring.

Fruen caught Hedvig by the arm. "Did you hear that? Coming down the stairs? Why, he must have been standing in the pulpit itself. There are no other stairs in the church! Haha! he's a marvel—he's more than a marvel—he's mad—stark, staring mad. Standing up in the pulpit in the dead of night, playing to the ghosts—playing magnificently, too—all except that messy thing. There, hark at the door creaking—creaking horribly! Why aren't you frightened, you little fool? I've lost the power to shiver and shake myself, but . . . There, he's gone."

But Johan did not go the way they had expected. He turned the corner, and his steps came crunching nearer. Then on a sudden Fru Clara found she had not forgotten after all how to shiver and shake. She cowered close to Hedvig in the darkest corner of the porch, held her breath, and stood there trembling. Hedvig did not tremble; she stood as if in a lovely trance, unable to move, feeling only that something must happen now. But Johan walked past them quietly, without a sigh, and a little farther on he stopped. When they ventured to look out, he was standing motionless on the verge of the slope, gazing towards the Toldbod itself.

For a quarter of an hour to the full he kept them thus on the rack. It seemed hours; their legs were near giving way under them; their eyes could no longer pierce through the dark. At last they fancied he must have vanished into the earth. But just as their patience was at breaking-point, Johan came out of the night

once more, and walked back past them with a steady step.

" That's the best fun I've had for ages," said Fruen when they got back. " And what a mercy he didn't see us. It would have been all over if he had."

" Yes, he'd have been furious," said Hedvig, with a shudder.

" I dare say," said her mistress calmly. " But he'd have been bursting with conceit, and that would have been worse."

Fru Clara said good-night, and went into her own room, where she lit a lamp and sat down to write. The letter was to a well-known professor of music, and part of it ran as follows :

" Since you'll have to come this way in any case, you might as well keep your promise and pay me a visit. I'll show you my home here, and my husband. In addition to which attractions, there is a sort of musical monstrosity in the place here that might interest you. This remarkable beast does not show itself in the daytime, but wanders about by night in churchyards or in the church itself, producing certain sounds which to me seem somewhat original. I consider it your duty to investigate the affair, in the cause of science, and ascertain more precisely the nature of the beast. . . ."

She closed down the envelope and was about to rise, when she heard some one striking a match in the bedroom. The slight sound was enough to change her purpose. She sat down again and passed one hand wearily over her eyes. It was dreadfully late. Nevertheless, she took a fresh sheet of paper, and wrote again, this time to one Frits, an old friend of hers, it seemed,

and now a Minister, set in authority over such things as railways. Him she entreated to do her the favour of extending the station at Knarreby as at present situated, and on no account to shift it altogether to the westward, where Lund and his party wished. She explained that the matter was one of the utmost importance to herself. " I can't have them spoiling all my pretty trees out here. And you won't let them, will you, Frits ? "

X

NOW and again there comes a letter from Sivert in America. He drives a milk-cart in Chicago, and is very happy. He earns unprecedented wages, and gets new things almost every other day: now a pair of lined gloves, now a pair of boots (made all in one piece), and last, not least, a new name—to wit, Jimmy. Surnames aren't used in America, he explains. And so delighted is he with his new name that he scrawls it out ten times the usual size, decorating the letters with leaves and flowers. Emanuel has strict instructions to report to Fru van Haag whenever one of these epistles arrives. Fruen begins to laugh and feel merry at the mere mention of Sivert. As a rule, she puts on her things and goes down to hear the letter read. Egholm is no more than mortal; he takes his chance when he sees it. And, having discovered Fru van Haag's interest in letters from Sivert, he endeavours to transfer something of that interest to himself—by reading them aloud. No one else is ever suffered to read them to her. And Fruen sits the while with a little plate of *Sylteтøj*, Anna ready to jump up at any moment, and Emanuel attentively studying the expression of Fru Clara's face over the edge of his book.

Egholm makes a great fuss before he begins. This in order to concentrate their attention.

"Now, what on earth have you *done* with the letter?

I told you to leave it here on my table. Ah, here it is in my pocket all the time.

" Now be quiet. Put these scraps in order and give me them as they come—No. 1, No. 2, and so on. I had to number them myself—he never troubles, the rascal. Ready ? Then I'll begin. First of all, he starts off with Chicago, Ill., 26/8, and next to that he draws a palm with a monkey climbing up. The sun sitting shining up above like a glowing cogwheel. The monkey, I suppose, is meant to be himself. . . ."

" Oh, if you're going to be funny, Fru van Haag and I'll go," says Fru Egholm sharply.

" And the graceful palm, of course, is his mother. . . ."

" I don't care for your flattery any more than your impertinence ! It doesn't mean much one way or the other."

" ' DEARLY beloved parents, brothers and sisters, Dog Fylla, friends and relations near and far, as many as remember me in the old country !

" ' Hearty thanks for the letter. But I must ask you always to remember for the future and write outside with my new name Jimmy which I'm called now, because the old one Sivert isn't worth five cents over here. Otherwise, everything all right and nothing much to tell anyway. I am sticking to the Lord. It makes you sort of pious being over here in a great big land flowing with milk and honey, as the Scripture says. The milk's my part—I start out with it at three in the morning. Harness the horse myself, which is a mule, and bit me in the arm the other day. But that was Saturday, and next day being Sunday, and Thompson the milkman, being a Methody, was in church, I pelted the brute with corn cobs, and Thompson, seeing it all

sweating and lashing out behind as soon as anyone came near, reckoned it must be the staggers, and gave me another horse for three days till the beast had forgotten about it.'

"A nice way to go on, indeed," put in his father. "And here he's drawn a long-eared creature with its tail up and breathing what looks like fire. That's his poor beast of burden, I suppose."

"Very likely it's meant to be you," said his wife. "You calling your poor son names when he's set to struggle with wild beasts out of the Natural History."

"'Thompson's a Scandinavian like me. Both he and his wife think no end of me by reason of my elegant manners and beautiful voice. They want me to turn Methody too. But I told them I must learn a bit about it first. But Thompson and me we've agreed we don't understand a word of the sermon, except just here and there, being all in English. There's two besides me driving carts for Thompson, but I'm the only one they ever ask in on Sundays, seeing there's a chance of me going over to the Methody lot. Please write and tell me, dearly beloved parents, if you think I ought. Perhaps he'll put my wages up a dollar or two a week—Mrs. Thompson says he might. But I'm not going to be tempted by worldly wealth and goods in a matter of religion, specially when the barber round the block says he'll give me two dollars to sing for his customers and lather up from 6 p.m., and let him put a bill in the window: "Come and hear the Swedish Nightingale."

"'And now how is my beloved of old, which is Minna Lund? If she'd come over here and sing she'd be

worth a thousand dollars. Write and tell me if she's got married or anything.

" ' I live a quiet and respectable life as before, and don't go out to places in the evening, because of having to get up so early. But the other day I met a man, Ferdinand Madsen, which you can see is a countryman, being from Skelskør. We got a can of beer, and he wanted me to go off on the tramp with him, out west. But I wouldn't listen to him, for he's an out-and-outer, which is the same as a good-for-nothing, wanting me to chuck up my job that's decently paid, and slope off without a word. Also he said I could do same as the nigger was here before me. That nigger, he pinched all the cash in the place, not to speak of what he did to Mrs. Thompson, but they caught him and strung him up to a lamp-post after, and tickled him to death. We don't stand that sort of thing over here. I helped tickle him, and, being noticed for the smart way I did it, they let me take over his job, and likewise his name, which was Jimmy.

" ' But I wouldn't do a thing like that—I couldn't. Being too much wrought upon by the teachings of Christian godliness that my dear parents taught me. And I told him so, the out-and-outer. No, I'm going to stay where I am, and tend to my work decent and honest, and sing my pretty songs all the time. It pays you best in the long run. In a little while you'll have me beginning to send money home. You can put it in the bank in my name, and no need to be shy of telling people about it.

" ' And now I close this letter with much love to you all, my dearest parents, and learned brother Emanuel, likewise sister Hedvig that's a perfect lady as near as can be, and her Duchess that got me away from the old

country. And kind regards to everybody else that I can't bother to think of their names because it's getting late. Specially don't forget my first and only love, Minna Lund, and ask if she's up to anything and everything as I should like.—Yours respectfully,

" ' JIMMY EGHOLM.

" ' P.S.—If I do go tramping with my new friend, Ferdinand Madsen, I'll let you have my new address. We shall be going round by Niagara Falls and such-like geography things. Each of us to have at least six layers of newspaper in our breeches behind. All tramps do that.' "

There was silence in the room for a few seconds when the letter was ended. All looked anxiously at Fru van Haag, but she only drew a deep breath and said :

" Thank you."

Egholm had certainly hoped for a signal for a general burst of laughter. He found to his surprise that he himself was unable to start laughing without a lead, and said disappointedly :

" Aren't we going to laugh a bit at Jimmy's letter ? "

" It was much too interesting to laugh at."

" Yes, that's true," said Fru Egholm.

" It was written by *your* son." Fruen nodded to Anna.

" Yes, yes."

" And *yours*." This was to Egholm.

" H'm. . . . I don't know. . . ."

" Yes, it was. You, Egholm, and Sivert, are the Lord's special pets. He's decked your brains with all sorts of Christmas-tree decorations, whilst other people's are just grey and bare. And I say : Open the door and

let us others have a look at all the wonderful things. Do some of your tricks, you lucky rascals that can ! "

But Egholm was by no means wishful to be included in such a category.

" Well, I never heard such a thing," he said, with something like indignation. " Are my ideas nothing but Christmas-tree decorations ? My deep religious feeling—is that nothing but foolery ? My inventions—humbug ? My turbine, for instance—was that a joke ? "

" Wait a minute. You mustn't say humbug. I didn't say so. Humbug isn't amusing, really. Your things are always the exact opposite of humbug —they're honestly meant. And as for the turbine, I've heard so much about it that I believe in it as a good invention. Why shouldn't there be useful things on a Christmas tree ? But now, look here, Egholm, and answer me ; haven't you yourself packed up your splendid idea in the most ridiculous wrappings, like a Christmas cracker ? *Do* you think a really earnest man would sacrifice a steam-turbine to the gods out of sheer pique, because a crowd of cobblers and barbers laughed at it ? What ? "

" Perhaps I ought rather to have bowed down in humility," said Egholm hesitatingly. " And tried to improve the thing. Made the boiler bigger, and . . ."

" Did I say anything about that ? Not a word ? I mean you could perfectly well afford to make that delightful sacrificial feast. And it's really worth more to the world to have seen it than to have got a new sort of turbine."

" Do you think so—do you really think so ? " said Egholm.

" Yes, I do. You just leave the world alone a few years, till the engineers and people have found out that

same turbine in the ordinary and uninteresting way. They can do it. It'll all come in time. But, again, a few years behind you. That's the way it has to be done. Oh, these engineers—I know quite a lot of them myself. Stuck-up lot, and the most dreadful bores. But often, of course, hard-working, clever men. There's one coming down here one day this week. You'll see him all right, for I fancy he'll walk in here and call on you himself."

"Will he talk about the turbine?" asked Egholm, drawing himself up suddenly.

"No, but about something else that may interest you. Frits writes me that he is sending over this engineer to do some surveying in connection with the new railway station. At the same time he is to ascertain the price of certain properties—yours included—which the railway might want to take over. Frits mentioned it quite casually in writing to me, so of course we mustn't say a word of it to anyone else."

The news touched Egholm's nerves as if with flame.

"But—good heavens . . . that—that'll be a stroke of business!"

"Yes, I dare say it might," said Fruen carelessly.

"Of course it must. The railway can afford to pay. What does the railway care for a trifle of money more or less when it wants to buy up my ground? It'll pay me what it's cost me, and the house here besides. Who is this Frits that wrote and told you?"

"Why, the Minister . . ."

"The Minister! . . . Good heavens! . . ."

"Now, don't be a snob, Egholm. Frits is a friend of mine. And Egholm's my *best* friend. That's rather more, isn't it? But tell me, now, what do you think you ought to get for this pretty little house of yours?"

"Well . . ." said Egholm, stroking his forehead. All sorts of calculations flew through his brain like a team of runaway horses. He tried desperately to grasp the reins. He knew, of course, what he had given for the place, but, naturally, with an opportunity like this, he ought to make an enormous profit out of it. "A thousand *Kroner*, at least."

"A thousand *Kroner*? The price of a cheap little cottage piano. A thousand *Kroner* for a house with a big garden at the back? How do you work that out?"

"I gave five hundred for the ground; I ought to get twice that at least."

"But what about the house?"

"Well, that didn't cost much, really. I bought the stuff from that workhouse place, and stuck most of it together myself. No, the house isn't worth much, but the site was so cheap, perhaps I might ask two thousand for the lot, with the garden, trees and lilies and all. . . . That is, if you think . . ."

"But what about the goodwill of the business? You've a good connection here, that brings you in enough to keep yourself, with a boat of your own, and *Sylletøj* for me when I come. You mustn't forget the business."

"I—I should take that with me," said Egholm, with a hesitating laugh. But he went as far as to advance the sum to two thousand five hundred. Even then, however, he shook his head and said again, "It's easy enough to ask, but shall I get it?"

But Fru Haag had her own ingenious method of calculation.

"We've got up as far as the price of a decent grand. Add on a thousand *Kroner* and multiply by two, and we'll be getting near it. How much is that, Emanuel?

Right : seven thousand. That's the sum you are to ask when the engineer comes. And if you dare to deceive me by asking a single *Øre* less, I'll write to Frits and get him to shift the railway to another town altogether. Now, do you understand ? "

" Yes, but . . ."

" If you give me any of your buts, I'll put the price up again ! "

Egholm swung round on the opposite tack. He felt as if he had the money in his hand already, and his face shone. He rose with a swing, and Fru van Haag, guessing he was about to grasp her hand and start a grand thanksgiving scene, hastened to busy herself with Emanuel's school-books, and run through his English exercise with him. A little after, Egholm had to go in to the studio, and Emanuel went off with a boy friend, leaving the two women alone.

" And what do you say, Little Mother, if this business comes off ? " said Fru van Haag.

" Why, it's such a wonderful big sum of money, I can't realise it at all. I never was good at money."

" Neither was I. It seems to me a ridiculous little sum for all you've got here. But I felt quite instinctively that our friend would spoil the whole thing by asking too little. He's that sort of man, that it's only the things he hasn't got that seem worth anything to him."

" There's one exception, I think."

" Is there ? What is it ? "

" *You.* It's a wonderful thing, the way he's taken it all since you came. I can't help shaking my head over it all day, sometimes, when I think about it."

" What is there to think about ? " asked Clara, with a smile. This was interesting.

" Why, it's just the most extraordinary thing in the

world, that's all. Egholm's another man since you came. He's turned so kind and good, it makes me feel quite anxious sometimes ; I can't help fancying he must be ill or something. He can use hard words now and then, of course, but nothing to what he used to do. And as for striking me—why, you'd think he'd forgotten how to lift his hand. But he's not ill. Not a bit. He takes his food as a man should, and sleeps sound at nights. I'll never believe there's any illness about that. He's more like well than ever he was. That's what I think of it. But you mustn't think he hasn't been good and kind at times before—hundreds of times. There was that day, for instance, when he took and kissed me on the station platform here at Knarreby, with I don't know how many people looking on. It was the day I first came down here with the children. One of the loveliest days in all my life. And then one night, just when he was getting finished with that turbine thing. Never a soul'd believe me if I told them how good he was to me that night. And a thousand other times, too, in little ways. But to speak of the time when we were first engaged—ah ! . . . Why, do you know he's actually written verses to me ! Heaps of them ! But all that's only been just for a bit, you understand—an afternoon, an evening, or so. Now and then perhaps for a day or two together. But I don't count that, because it was always just before the lottery came out. And that, of course . . . But otherwise, it's mostly been the hard side of him I've seen most of."

" You poor thing ! When was it he began being unkind to you ? Was it right from the first ? "

" It was on our wedding day ; we'd had our meal, such as it was, and the others had gone. Mother squeezed my hand and *looked* so hard at me outside in the passage.

And I couldn't help crying when she went, and that made him furious, of course. Well, I ought not to have cried, I suppose, but I simply couldn't help it, and then he got angry. But, as I said, he's been quite nice ever so many times since then. Dear Lord, yes, I've no cause to complain ; I got the man I wanted, and I'm not complaining either. You wouldn't call it so ? I'm only just saying the little ways he's been, so you can understand what it means to me to have him like he is now. It's wonderful. Why, I can turn him round my little finger, as they say, and tie knots in him, if I only like to try. I could tell you one time by way of example, and that from this very morning. You know he's always had a fancy for collecting all sorts of rubbish, and to-day he comes home dragging a whole sack of those paper-mashy figure things they stick on coffins—they don't use them so much nowadays, but you know the sort of thing I mean — angels' heads and that sort — Faith, Hope, and Charity, and burning torches, and clasped hands that's supposed to mean farewell-for-ever-deeply-mourned. Very pretty in a sorrowful way, and I won't say no, but still . . . You wouldn't call it the sort of thing to stick up over a house for the living. That's what he was going to do with them. He was that set on it. You know what he's like when he once gets an idea into his head. But I was so dreading what'd come of it if he started now, setting the neighbours talking again now after they've quieted down and left us in peace for a bit, after that turbine business and the house here itself that they can't abide, because it's not quite like the others. Ah, we've had a deal to put up with that I won't go into now, as when Egholm went out after a book in the snow, all barefooted, and they thought he was mad. No, but for the sake of the children, and

Emanuel especially, now he's at his fine school.—'What's an ignoramus like you know about such things?' says he.—'I know enough to know what sets folk grinning at us all,' says I. 'I've sense enough for that, anyway. I don't mind the garlands and torches so much, and maybe a cherub or so, or a Faith-and-Hope, that might mean anything. But if you start nailing up an arch of farewell hands over the door'—that's what he was going to do—'they'll be calling the place Coffin Lodge at once.'—'And what do I care if they do?' says he. 'I don't care that for them! Nor for anybody!' And I thought to myself, Ah, what about how he goes bowing and scraping as soon as they come to be taken.—'But you're all wrong,' he says, 'anyway, calling them farewell-for-ever hands and deeply mourned. *They're hearty-greeting hands*, and you know as well as I do, *Fru van Haag's coming round this afternoon!*'"

"Oh, you delightful children!" murmured Fru van Haag.

"Well, of course, that made a difference, and I softened down a bit. It's the *thought* that matters, and it was a right enough thought too—in his scatter-brained fashion, that is. 'Fruen 'll be mad with you,' I said, 'if you start any of your nonsensical tricks.'—'Think so?' he says, and drops his hammer there on the stand. But I softened down, as I said, and let him stick up just one pair under the creeper, where it didn't show so much. There's no sense in being hard on a man more than you need, is there?"

"No," said Fru van Haag softly, stroking the little woman's cheek.

On the way home Fru van Haag had the good fortune to encounter Johan Fors alone, in one of the little side streets, where they could talk together. It was an

opportunity she had long wished for. She stopped in front of him, and said :

" Aren't you the man that plays the violin ? "

Johan frowned, and looked her up and down. But the effort to appear dignified himself in face of this elegant creature with her quiet assurance of manner soon proved too much for him. He even unbent so far as to smile a little, and answered :

" Only a bit. And only to myself."

" There's a rhapsody of Liszt that you know—with a chromatic scale ever so long."

But Johan turned wrathful at this, partly because he did not rightly understand what she meant.

" I've never invited anyone to listen to me that I'm aware of."

" Really ? You must forgive me, but I can't shut my ears at will, you know. I was lying awake one night—perhaps you live somewhere near. I could hear it quite distinctly through the window."

Johan did not stop to wonder how she could know it was he who had been playing. He was relieved at the suggestion of his living near, and said :

" Well, there's nothing to be ashamed of, I suppose, if a man does play the violin. Only, I don't like being spied on. . . ."

" Of course there's nothing to be ashamed of. I should think not, indeed. But, all the same, the end of that rhapsody as you played it was all wrong."

But Fru van Haag was badly out in her reckoning here.

" It was false as could be—abominable ! "

" If it's the one I think, then I learned it of Fruen herself. Haha ! I'm painting in the church, as I dare say you know, seeing it's in the papers about it, and I

heard you playing it. I wasn't spying—not a bit of it. I was working in the church, as I said, and, coming round behind one evening, your windows were open, and so . . . But if mine's wrong, then yours is wrong too, for I've never heard it anywhere else."

"Do you mean to say my playing's wrong?"

"No more than mine, I suppose. The piece was the same both times—that is to say, all except the end. I didn't like that part, so I made up another. I've made up heaps of pieces myself, all through."

"And you take liberties like that with Liszt?"

"It's all the same to me who it is, when the piece itself's a silly jumble with no sense in it."

Fru van Haag looked at the man critically for a moment. What a dreadfully rude fellow he was! But there was something honest about his well-shaped hands, red and soiled as they were. There was a remarkable will power in his firm blue eyes. No, she would not forsake Hedvig's love for a breach of etiquette.

"I stopped you really because I had something particular to say to you. Professor Hans Juhl is coming down here shortly. If you care about it, he could get you into the Conservatoire in Copenhagen, perhaps, if you would come up and play to him at my house. Hans Juhl—I don't know if you know who he is?"

"Yes; I know his name from the papers."

"Well and good. If you think you'd care. . . . Of course, I can't promise anything. But it would be a good thing for you to learn something—don't you think?"

"No—I'm not keen on it. But I'd like to have a word with the Professor, all the same."

"Oh . . . ? You think you are perfect, then, in every way ? "

Johan shook his head gently, and said :

"Perfect—that's saying a good deal. I don't suppose the Professor himself is that. But I've got my work in the church now that'll take me a year at least. And, besides, I know quite enough of the part that's my special line—making up new pieces and altering old ones. Composing, they call it. There was a musician I met at a big café in Munich—Wunsche, his name was. And he said, ' There's a hundred thousand can play for one that can compose.' There's a deal of truth in that. But I'd like to have a talk with the Professor, and see if he'd write my things down with the proper notes, so they could be printed and sold. I've often thought of that."

Heavens ! Was there ever such stiff-necked conceit ? What could be done with the man ?

"But surely it would be better for you to learn to write down your music yourself, without having to ask the Professor to help you every time. Don't you think ? "

"Yes, that'd be grand, to write music straight off," said Johan Fors dreamily. "But I'm not going to Copenhagen to their music school or whatever they call it. Haven't time. And I don't suppose they go in for my special line much there."

"I dare say we shall have to postpone that for the present," said Fruen, with admirable seriousness. "But I will send you word as soon as Hans Juhl arrives. If your things are good, he will write them out for you. I'll answer for that."

"Thank you. Yes, the pieces are good enough. If not, I'd have seen it myself. I don't coddle up a

thing because it's my own work. It's the same with painting pictures. No good—then chuck it away and done with it."

" Oh, so you paint pictures too ? "

" Used to."

" Landscapes, or flowers, or . . . ? "

" All sorts. Fishermen. Vesuvius. King Christian on horseback. But I've given it up. Stand there two and three days for a measly four or five or six *Kroner*. . . ."

" You've travelled a good deal. Vesuvius, you said ? I've been there too."

" No, I never got farther than Rome. After that we went up northwards, and by steamer from Livorno. But everybody knows Vesuvius."

" So you paint your pictures from post cards ? Doesn't matter in the least if you've never seen the thing yourself—what ? "

Johan had sunk so far in her estimation that she no longer found him even amusing. She intended to offend him if possible before she went.

Johan thought for a moment, and then said :

" No—o, you ought to see a thing, of course, before you can paint it. See and look all the time. Hand should work by itself, then, till it's done. But for those auction sales, when you never get beyond six *Kroner*. . . . I did a good picture once, though, of my mother. She died when I was six, and I could hardly remember her, really. I've got it in my pocket, if you'd like . . ."

Johan set down his paint-pots and took out a thick pocket-book.

" Here . . . here it is." He handed her a drawing, worn and soiled at the edges.

" Did you really do that ? " said Fru van Haag. Her

lips were parted, her eyes opened wide as if to draw in the impression. " Why, that's splendid ! "

" Yes, it's good. There's not many could do it as well."

Fru van Haag frowned, and a sudden suspicion crossed her mind. This conceited young man was not speaking the truth, perhaps. The drawing was no doubt simply a copy.

She glanced up from the paper and looked searchingly at him. But Johan's face was full of proof that the drawing was genuine, for there was an unmistakable likeness between the delicate face of the woman and himself. It was just the face his mother or his sister must have had. The drawing was done with wondrously fine strokes of the pen; it looked like an engraving. The lines curved boldly, bringing out a woman's head of unusual beauty.

Fruen looked once more from the drawing to the face of the man before her. No, to be honest, she could not but confess that Johan was a remarkably handsome young man. The setting sun was full in his face. Now and again he blinked his eyes calmly, but without moving a muscle beyond. He was deep in thought over something or other as he stood there waiting for her to return the picture. What eyes he had !

" And had you no picture to draw from ? "

" No—it's just as I *thought* her. But I suppose it's easier to think what your mother was like than Vesuvius, for instance."

" But—you're really an artist ! " said Fruen, with enthusiasm, and her glance met his.

Johan took back his drawing calmly, set it carefully in his pocket-book, and returned the latter to its place. Then he took up his paint-pots, each on one crooked

finger, turned his head sharply first to one side then to the other, as if looking for his answer, drew himself up at last, and said slowly, as if it were a matter of course :

" I hope so, I'm sure. But only with the violin."

XI

OLD POULSEN—grey, old, threadbare Told-assistant Poulsen—has many duties to perform, but the first of the day is the hardest, though perhaps the one he sets most store by, as carrying a certain dignity. He has to wake his chief, and call him to his official duties. Poulsen carries out his task with care, and with the nervous trepidation of a young priest officiating at his first funeral. At twenty minutes to eight he lets himself into the office, hangs up his things, and begins walking up and down the linoleum, with his hands behind his back and his left shoulder thrust up. At every turn he glances nervously towards the office clock; he has an ineradicable suspicion that it is going to stop. He compares it with his watch, not once but many times. At five minutes to eight he leaves the office—after looking at himself in the glass—and steps noiselessly—save when he stumbles, which has been known to happen—up the stairs and into Hedvig's kitchen. He does not knock, but simply appears, after the manner of a ghost. A grey, lifeless nod is the utmost he gives by way of greeting. He carries his watch in his hand, and gazes at it as at a magic crystal—hence his occasional stumbling on the stairs. Hedvig, despite the occupation of her mind by the god of love, is still visited at times by the devils of mischief; she lays all manner of noisy implements and chattels just inside the door, where the poor old soul can walk into them

and die of fright at the resulting clamour. Brooms are useful, dustpans are excellent, and there is one particular tray that goes careering half across the kitchen, to subside with a sort of dying moan. Poulsen has never yet accustomed himself to these little surprises ; he stands there, stiff and shuddering, till the racket is over.

" You must be mad," he whispers.

" Why ? What's the matter ? "

" You—you'll wake him ! "

" Me ? Why, it was you, Poulsen. What do you want up here ? "

" I've got to go and wake him—you know that well enough."

" Why, then, all the better. Save you the trouble."

" Oh, you . . ." Poulsen says no more. What's the use of talking to a creature like this ? Wake people up that way—wake his respected chief with scuttles and pans ? No. . . . Hedvig's a good soul at bottom, perhaps, but she'll get into trouble one of these days. Lose her place as sure as can be, with her disrespectful ways. And the worst of it is, she drags others into it as well.

Poulsen has got as far as the bedroom door. Holding his breath, he raps twice with his knuckles, and holds his breath again.

" Yes ! " from within.

" Half-past eight."

" Tha-anks."

Poulsen's mission is over. He shuffles off, relieved.

" You'd better give over those tricks now, Hedvig. It—it's not a bit funny, you know. Give over, little Hedvig. It isn't nice of you, you know, playing tricks on an old man."

" Me ? Well, I never did ! Can't I put a broom

down where I please? The idea! And in my own kitchen, too! What'd you say if I came down interfering with you and where you put your pens?"

"Hedvig . . . now don't go turning and twisting things like that. You know it's not true, Hedvig."

"Well, really, you are . . . You'll worry the life out of me. And I'm nervous enough as it is. It's anæmia. I mean it, Poulsen; I've got anæmia, as true as I stand here. But as for saying what isn't true . . . telling lies . . . Oh, Poulsen! I only know one person in the world that tells lies, and that, I'm sorry to say, is . . . *you*, Poulsen. Yes, and I can prove it. You said it was half-past eight, and there's the eight-o'clock whistle just going—listen! There's the church clock striking eight. Telling lies, Poulsen! And to the master!"

Poulsen looks round helplessly. They have discussed the ethics of this question before.

"You know well enough it's by official orders—from Hr. Toldforvalter van Haag himself. And when he says I'm to say so . . . Wassermann didn't, I know, but . . ."

"Oh, it doesn't make it any better that there's two of you in the plot. A lie's a lie, you can't get over that."

What could poor Old Poulsen say in reply? A lie was a lie—that was his principle entirely. But could he dare to say how delicious this particular lie was to himself—and desperately thrilling into the bargain. For it really needed a mighty effort to stand there, with the watch in his hand pointing eight o'clock precisely, and call out boldly—or as boldly as he might—"Half-past!" No, the question was far too complicated for Old Poulsen to explain with any satisfaction. It must be his master's affair.

"There, there, little Hedvig. Don't let's quarrel now—don't let's quarrel about it. I didn't mean anything

unkind. But do remember now another time—not all that noise. Remember another time. I'm an old man, my dear. . . . Well, well! . . ."

Toldforvalter van Haag reached out for his watch beside the bed. Eight o'clock. Good Old Poulsen—trustworthy old soul! Factory whistles and clanging of church clocks now, as if confirming the fact under oath. Hr. van Haag leaned back contentedly among his pillows. He had contrived for himself a withered little pleasure by that arrangement. Poulsen came up and said half-past eight, and *still* he could stay in bed another half-hour without being late. Autocrat. Even time itself moved at his command.

Twenty minutes later. Hr. van Haag is sitting up now, with eyes wide open. He is not in need of sleep—he is simply waiting for the half-hour to pass. If he got up now, it would be so much wasted. He will not even unfasten his moustache-band before the time. A thought comes into his head, and he looks round. There in the other bed lies Fru Clara, red and white with sleep, her masses of brown hair loose over the pillow. So rich it looked, as if it had grown thus in the night. Who knows but perhaps Hr. van Haag has some thought of his own anent the loveliness of that hair. Certainly there is no trace of any emotion to be seen in his face, but he keeps his Toldforvalter-glance in that direction, gazing with a certain intensity, for a few seconds later Fru Clara's left eyelid glides languidly aside, just once, revealing something black and white—a mystery in black and white . . . A thousand times more—a glance!

The eyelid droops again over its black and white. Something like a smile creases Hr. van Haag's moustache-band for a moment and shows in his eyes. But Fruen acts her little part as ever, making that glance a lie with

her admirable feigning of sleep. Listen ! She breathes a sigh—a sigh of uttermost drowsiness. Daylight and life are unspeakably indifferent to her—see, she writhes still closer down among the pillows. A lock of hair tickles her face ; how sleepily, unconsciously, her hand pats it aside. At last, in sullen helplessness, she manages to turn over on the other side, sighs once more, and relapses into sleep . . . sleep.

Hr. van Haag gets out of bed and walks with his unassailably natural air to the washstand and back again. Then, having put on his trousers, he makes a few jerks this way and that with arms and legs. This is health exercise. Fruen sleeps on, more soundly than before ; he may turn round suddenly as he pleases, but no more glimpses now of a mystery in black and white. Well, well . . . he starts talking to himself. If anyone cares to listen, they may. Each word seems drawn through his nose as by a string.

" If it keeps fine to-day we must have my things out to be brushed and beaten. They want looking to badly."

Not a bad opening this. It takes a good deal to lie still and be fast asleep instead of saying, " Never you mind about the things. They were thoroughly brushed last Friday ; you know that well enough."

" And she can call me when she's done them. Her fingers are all thumbs, that girl. I'll have to put them in the press myself. The way they were creased last time was disgraceful. And the grey pair with the fine check she'd better leave out, while I think of it. Weiszs will very likely be round this afternoon to tea."

Another excellent shot. Had Hr. van Haag's eyes been a little sharper, he might have discerned a slight change of colour in the cheeks of his sleep-encastled spouse. It was a searching test indeed, to refrain from

waking up and giving vent to indignation and disgust in suitable retort. Such as, for instance, " Oh, very well, then ! If you must have those two imbeciles to tea again, you can entertain them by yourself ! I shall be *out* this afternoon. At my friend Egholm's, if you want to know ! "

But Fru Clara thrust aside temptation. Her husband put on his necktie, and continued :

" There aren't many people of standing in the place ; we must make the most of those there are. Weiszs are going to the Tyrol in the spring ; we might go with them part of the way."

More inward struggle for Fru Clara. But by now it was close on ten minutes to nine, when her lord and master took his morning cup of tea. He knew it, and made the most of the time remaining.

" Yes, I'll have the light grey, if you please, my dear. If I can get through with these accounts in time, I'll come up this afternoon, but I can't be sure. It doesn't matter as far as I'm concerned, but I was thinking you must need a little recreation after your lamplighters and photographers, and Heaven knows who else it is you're always fussing about. Yes, the grey pair with the light check."

Still no awakening. Hr. van Haag creaked once across the room and back, gathering force for a new attack.

" The photographer man at any rate you will have to give up. *I won't have it !* You simply can't go visiting at your servant's house. I declare you smell of the place every time you've been there. I've noticed it. Moreover, I understand he was formerly in the State service—something on the railway. And as an official in the service of the State myself, I *cannot*, and as your

husband, I *will* not have you mixing familiarly—involving *me*—with this—this—*rag-and-bone merchant*!"

That did it. In a moment she was sitting upright in bed, her cheeks flushed hotly, her face dark and devilish under the wealth of hair. Her white, clenched hands were raised quivering above her head, dangerous looking, for all the softness of the lace at her wrists. She drew one breath to the full. He had wrung a cry from her, and wakened those black-and-white eyes to a look.

"Go! Get away with you! Out of my sight—do you hear? Rag-and-bone merchant, you say—ah, and you're not? No; with your trousers creased in a line. Rag-and-bone merchant—is that the worst you can find to say of a man? Ah, but I know something worse than that! You didn't say: '*Egholm's just like me.*' *That* would have been an insult if you like. Did you hear me? But you mark my words, you can stop your supercilious airs. I'm not going to stand this sort of thing any longer; talking and talking at me morning and night. I'll go away altogether. Ah, you think you're safe, don't you?—think you've cut me off, now that I've put all my money into a single hopeless speculation. Yes, educating you. It was for that I took you with me everywhere we went. Did you think it was for the pleasure of your company? Haha! But I won't stay here like this. And there are plenty of places I can go to, even if I haven't any money. And, anyhow, I won't sleep in the same room with you. You must be mad, I think, the way you lie there talking to yourself in the dark, and in the morning while I'm asleep. I wake up, and there you are talking away in that horrible office voice. And another thing! I won't hear a single word against Egholm. I forbid you so much as to think his name. Or if you do, then think the truth, and that is

that you've him to thank for keeping me here at all! Do you hear what I say?"

The last question was entirely justified, for Hr. van Haag was completing his toilet without so much as a quiver of the hand. At the moment he was examining closely in a hand-glass the tiny wart at one corner of his mouth; it appeared to interest him deeply. Fruen tugged and tore at her clothes; her nightdress slipped from her shoulders. But when he lifted his eyes and looked at her, she cowered down, shivering, again, with the coverlet up to her chin. And then she found more to say.

"Egholm and I were just as good as lovers once, you may remember. *And we might be the same again!* Do you hear? Again and again. And you'd have to put up with it!"

Hr. van Haag had finished; just one thing more. . . . He opened the window and drew his breath deeply three times. Breathing exercises.

Fru Clara sank back helplessly. No fire can make impression on a fog. Tearfully she said:

"And if you go dragging any of your horrible people up here, it's your own affair. I'm ill, and shan't get up. . . ."

She crept down among the bedclothes again and actually groaned. But after a few minutes she sits up again and shakes her head. Then, getting out of bed, she stands for a moment in thought; goes over to the window—not the one *he* had used; that was unclean—but to the other. Here she can let in good salt sea air—strengthening air. She throws back her head and is lovely to see. Then she slips her garments from her, and is no less lovely on that account. She steps into the bath, and presses clear cold water from a big sponge

over her body, lots and lots of water, sending the blood to her heart, making her forget all ugly things. With youthful, natural delight she falls to playing with the water, letting a stream trickle down between her eyes and find its way down her as it will in rivulets and cascades. Clouds on the mountain-top, she thinks to herself, and raining in the valley. And she laughs.

Hr. van Haag is possibly thinking the same. He has opened the door and is looking on interestedly, though he does not laugh. But no, he can hardly be thinking that, for *his* wanderings among mountains with snow-white peaks have left no memories behind save of sore feet.

The draught from the open door makes her turn.

" Standing there spying ! " she says bitterly.

" The grey with the light check ; don't forget," says Hr. van Haag in his most casual drawl.

" Light check—ah yes, I shan't forget. I'll give you a receipt for the order—there ! "

And *there* is the sponge like a big, heavy bird, full in his face.

Hr. van Haag closes the door and goes out in the kitchen to dry himself. A minute after, on the stroke of nine, he creaks down the stairs to his office.

So much might happen in an hour in the little Toldbod at Knarreby. And albeit Toldforvalteren had but a little dry and withered brain, there was only one thing of it all that was outside his calculations—to wit, the sponge, which upset the elegant curve of his moustache entirely. All the rest he had himself brought about by simple means. *He could do it all over again to-morrow, if he liked.* And he very likely would. It was really entertaining to see Fru Clara acting her part. He might try again this very afternoon. What would she say, now,

if he were to ask Købmand Lund and his daughter round to tea as well ? Lund was quite a respectable man, with a certain position in the place—a man, moreover, who knew how to treat an official in the State service with proper respect. Yes . . . yes, he would ask them. And tell her about it at dinner. A fine idea. Lund, he knew, was the one man she detested more than any other.

Thus boys of a certain type will sprinkle a cat with paraffin and set it alight, innocently desirous of observing the effects.

But Fru Clara received the news with curious indifference.

The table was faultlessly laid, as usual, with a vase of flowers. Outside, the Belt lay blue and gleaming ; its wave-reflections flickered on the ceiling above them. Hr. van Haag sat at one end of the table, his wife at the other. Fruen had secretly had an extra flap put in the table, increasing the distance between them. Almost a stone's-throw away they were now. But near enough still for *words* to be flung with dire effect.

" See there are plenty of lemons, will you ? Last time we ran out—it was very awkward indeed."

No answer—of course. But neither was there any quiver of the hand, and this was strange.

" We shall want five or six lemons, at least. Lund and his daughter are coming as well. Lund the draper, you know. Quite an intelligent fellow—man of the world."

Still nothing happened. Hr. van Haag did not venture to raise the topic of Egholm, fearing lest his wife's soup-plate might go the way her sponge had gone that morning.

No, Fruen made no answer to this or to any of

the little sharp-edged remarks that followed; she had formed her resolution, which was to go round to Egholm's and stay there till late in the evening. If it led to a scene, well and good, let it! Her purpose gave her strength; so much so that she even felt able to spend an hour at her piano after the meal. And her good humour was perhaps augmented by the knowledge that her playing would disturb Hr. van Haag at his afternoon nap.

But then, just as she was going out, came a message that Weiszs could not come—a visitor had just arrived and they could not get away, said the maid, with many compliments and apologies.

"Oh, how terrible!" cried Fruen, in mock dismay. "You really ought to break such news more gently. A visitor, you say?"

"Well, yes, it's somebody from Copenhagen, just in by the train. Engineer, I think he is—and mistress's cousin. And mistress was that put out about it, but seeing it was her cousin . . ."

"An engineer? Really! You don't know his name? Was it Sveidal, by any chance?"

"Yes—Sveidal; that was the name on his bag."

"Go back and tell them to come round and bring their visitor with them—if he's not too tired. Say I should be delighted, and they must come."

Hedvig, listening, stared open-mouthed as her mistress ran to the window and called once more after the girl:

"Say I shall be very disappointed if they don't come, all three of them!"

Fru Weisz herself was no less astonished when she received the message.

Fru Weisz could never forget her first visit at the

Haags'—she had called first, seeing that Fru van Haag, apparently oblivious of what was the proper thing, had neglected to call upon *her*. Fru van Haag had suddenly clasped her hands to her head and said, " For Heaven's sake don't laugh like that ; it sounds like wailing over a corpse ! " A moment after, she had offered a thousand apologies—she was dreadfully nervous at times, she explained. But it was impossible to forgive a thing like that !

A little after four the guests arrived. First Lund and his daughter—or, rather, Lund's daughter and Lund, he being, as it were, a trifle she had chanced to bring along, despite the fact that he had evidently plundered his stock to fill himself out and look spick and span. His gloves were bursting at the seams with newness, his raincoat rasped like sand-paper at every step, and one of his galoshes had a cardboard ticket with the price on dangling from one side. Minna was a tall and ample young lady of commanding presence. Only when she expressed her thanks for the invitation did she show a touch of something approaching servility in her voice and her watery blue eyes.

" Quite astounded, I assure you," quacked out Lund. " Thought it must be a mistake—*quack !* "

Minna took a step back, edging her father in between the coats in the rack and suppressing him.

There was nothing particularly palatial about the rooms at the Toldbod, but the two visitors considered them so, and felt it their duty to express their admiration for every chair before sitting down.

" Look there, Minna—that carpet's genuine Smyrna. Genuine. I've always held it a mark of real culture to have genuine Smyrna carpets. We've got them at home. Yes, I've always said it's a matter of duty, when you're

in the business, to lead the way. It's not a bad advertisement, you know, when you can say, ' It's what we use ourselves.' See what I mean ? Allow me, Frue, I'll just have a look . . . real genuine Smyrna, yes . . . no, halt a minute, though, not quite . . . no, *that* it's not. But a beautiful piece of work, all the same. Now, would it be rude to ask what you gave for it ? Oh yes, there's Minna nudging me to be quiet, I know. But all the same, I'd like to know. I'm interested in these things."

" The carpets ? I don't know, Hr. Lund. I never can remember figures."

" Ninety *Kroner* ? "

" Ninety ? I don't know, really ; can't remember."

" No, no, of course—no business of mine, really. But I'm interested in these things. . . . And you need not be afraid of telling *me*, you know . . . heh ! " And Hr. Lund endeavours to restrain a very confidential smile.

Fru van Haag had turned herself upside down to-day. She went round the house with them, showing her possessions untiringly. She would even have shown them over the bedroom, only the door was locked. Hr. van Haag was in there—had been for over an hour—busy with the perfection of his toilet.

They settled down for the time being in Fru Clara's blue room. Minna flung wide her arms at sight of the piano, and exclaimed, " Magnificent !—charming !—delightful !—splendid ! " and any other high-sounding words she could hit on. She had a grand herself, but not that make ; no, not precisely the same . . .

" My daughter teaches singing, you know," put in Lund. " Six pupils, isn't it, now ? "

" Eight," corrected Minna gently.

" Ah, you're counting those two—that won't do !

I only reckon the ones that *pay*. The apprentice and the charwoman—no, you can't count them, my dear ! "

" Who's talking about money ? A pupil's a pupil, I suppose," said Minna, flushing right up under her fair hair.

" I've only one pupil myself," said Fru van Haag. " She's learning the piano. And I generally have to pay her to come to lessons at all ! "

" Ah, that's Hedvig Egholm," said Lund the omniscient. " We've heard of Fruen's noble generosity in that quarter."

Hr. van Haag came creaking in, newly creased and beaten and brushed, smoothed and dyed and generally irreproachable. At the same time, the postmaster and his wife appeared, leading a tall man, Engineer Sveidal, who stretched out a big red paw in all directions, and doubled himself up in the middle whenever anyone grasped it. Lund walked round him once, studying his knickers ; thought for a moment of making inquiries on the spot as to price and place of origin, but gave it up ; after all, no demand for that sort of goods in Knarreby. Minna held the red paw in her own for a moment, pressing it generously, promisingly, with her elbow cocked up in fashionable style, but, seeing that he did not look up, and only stood there like an extinguished lighthouse, she turned up her nose and dropped his hand like a dead thing. A little after, the engineer had found a seat, with his knees high up, in the lowest chair in the room.

Hedvig handed round tea and biscuits and marmalade. The gentlemen took their tea with a dash of rum. Hr. van Haag and his friend the postmaster were fraternising over a little table. They did not speak, but sat clearing their throats alternately at long intervals, and scrutinising each other's clothes. Postmaster Weisz was hopelessly

behind in the race. Here was van Haag with a waistcoat of entirely new and unfamiliar cut—certainly none of the three local tailors had any idea of turning out a waistcoat that fashion. Ugh, no, of course not! Postmaster Weisz had endeavoured to compete in other fields. He had bought himself a bicycle, and was looking forward to the sight of Hr. van Haag snailing ignominiously behind him. But what did Hr. van Haag do then? He refrained from exposing himself to ignominy, and *did not buy a bicycle at all*! Now, what could one do with a man like that?

Lund had endeavoured once or twice to quack himself edgewise into the conversation, but as the two gentlemen ignored him, he was reduced to making himself pleasant to the engineer and the ladies.

"So we've an engineer in our midst? Well, now, really. Knarreby's getting quite an important place. I made a bad guess the first time I saw you, just as you came by—my shop's midway down the street, as near as can be; I don't know if you noticed it? Two raincoats hanging outside. That is to say, there's only one there now—hehe! No? Well, never mind. I was standing just inside the window—but you didn't notice me, perhaps? No—you need not say no; I'm quite aware I can be seen from outside when I'm in the window—hehe! But never mind . . . I saw *you*. And I made a bad guess the first time—thought you were a tourist. Then afterwards I found out you were an engineer, a cousin of Fru Weisz's, and . . . in a word, all the rest of it."

"I suppose I am a tourist, in a way," said the engineer, lifting his head with an effort.

"A tourist . . . in a way?" repeated Lund, with careful precision.

" Ye—es."

Frk. Minna sent her father a chilling glance, whereupon he hastened to say :

" Yes—yes, of course. I understand—yes. In a way, of course. . . ."

He pondered over it for quite a while.

" Help yourselves, do, ladies and gentlemen. Hedvig, let us have some more tea. Somebody's been praising your things, Hedvig. Aren't you glad ? " And Fru van Haag managed to pinch Hedvig's arm as she passed, as a sign of confidential relations between them.

Fru Weisz kept on with biscuits and marmalade till she gasped ; Minna, on the other hand, took sparingly of everything, out of regard to her figure. The only thing she allowed herself without restraint was cigarettes, which were not fattening.

" And why didn't you come earlier, Hr. Sveidal, when everything was so much lovelier and nicer ? " said Frøken Lund.

Sveidal stared uncomprehendingly — Minna had waved her hand as if suggesting that " everything " referred to herself, her heart, that had been lovelier once upon a time.

But Lund was smarter, and put in :

" My daughter means the situation—the situation here, you know, is far more impressive in the height of summer."

" Situation—you with your situation," said Fru Weisz in a moment of impatience. She had discovered she could eat no more.

" Our situation's really quite nice—for a little place like this. Don't you think so, Hr. Sveidal ? " said Minna.

" Well, I—er—I haven't seen much of it as yet, you know. But if you think so, Frøken, of course . . ."

" Oh, how *can* you ? " said Minna archly, flinging herself back in her chair.

" Ah, he's one of the right sort, that know how to say pretty things to the ladies," put in Lund delightedly.

Fru Weisz uttered a scornful sort of sound, but Fru van Haag, seeing her chance, put in a word.

" Come along, Hr. Sveidal, and let me show you the view from here. It's the finest in the town, I will say that, without boasting."

The engineer rose awkwardly, and walked to the window, but as Fru Weisz, ever on her guard, was preparing to follow, Fru Clara said :

" It's best really from the back—this way." And drawing Hr. Sveidal through into the kitchen, she closed the door behind them.

" You are going to call on a man here named Egholm ? "

The engineer was astonished, and appeared even more so.

" The Minister wrote me about it," went on Fru Clara, fixing him with her commanding eyes. " Now, I want you to do me a favour. Come up here and talk to me before you go to Egholm's. Will you ? Here—that's the Minister's letter."

" Yes, yes, of course—since you're in his confidence. But—really, you know, my business here is a secret."

" Thank you," said Fru Clara.

Engineer Sveidal felt like an unwilling participant in some conspiracy ; he looked confused, and could give but the vaguest report of any view when he returned to the drawing-room.

Fru Weisz signalled to her husband.

Fru Clara smiled contentedly, and said to Hedvig :

" It's going on splendidly."

Then suddenly, glancing out over the harbour, she perceives the little island steamer just putting in, and passengers coming ashore. There are barely half a dozen —the season is nearly over. One of them is a little stout man, who trips down the gangway on small feet, and stands looking helplessly about him. Fru Clara flutters down the steps like a bird, and plants herself in front of him.

" *Goddag, Goddag,* Professor Juhl ! "

The little gentleman feels in his breast pocket, takes out a case which he opens with a snap, and sets a pair of gold-rimmed glasses on his nose. This done, he allows himself to break into a smile, and says :

" Well, my dear, here I am, you see ! "

" Welcome ! But where on earth have you come from by that little steamer ? "

The Professor makes a grimace, and waves his hand as if indicating that he has come from somewhere or other quite immaterial to the business in hand.

" Did you write ? I've had no word from you."

" No. What was there to write about ? Have you anything to eat in the house ? "

" Yes, indeed, my dear Professor."

" What ? "

" What ? Oh, everything. How should I know ? "

" H'm. Perhaps I ought to have written, after all," says the Professor darkly to himself.

" But you can have whatever you like for supper. Just say what you'd fancy."

" Can I ? Good. Then I'll have some of the fish out of that water there. *Fried eels*—that's what I'll have."

" Come along with me and you shall hear me tell the maid yourself."

" Hedvig," says Fru Clara as soon as they are upstairs, " here's a Professor who wants fried eels for supper."

" Right ! " says Hedvig smartly.

The Professor sees the future bright before him. " Nice girl, that. Charming girl," he says, as he hangs up his coat.

" But—who's that in there ? " he goes on suddenly, starting at the sound of voices within.

" Oh, only a few harmless creatures—my husband's one."

" No ! " says the Professor, stamping his little feet obstinately on the carpet.

Fru Clara had herself thought of sparing her new guest and hiding him away till the others had gone. But now she feels a devilish impulse to " mix the drinks." Accordingly, calling up her never-failing womanly power, she steps briskly ahead, and utters the one word :

" Nonsense ! "

The Professor gives way, but, before entering, he steps back stealthily to the kitchen door and whispers hoarsely :

" *Fat ones !* "

" Of course," says Hedvig.

" Charming girl ! Charming ! "

A sigh of wondering admiration went through the room as Fru Clara introduced the newcomer :

" Professor Hans Juhl. My old teacher and friend."

All knew him by name and reputation—and each contrived to mention the fact on being introduced.

Lund, however, must have been distrait for the moment, for he croaked teacher and friend—delightful, yes. Had it not been for a decided talent for business he would have studied Latin and Greek himself. . . .

" It was music," said the Professor.

" No, really ? And so you are musical, too ? In your spare time, I suppose ? "

At this the Professor took out his little case and clicked it open ; there was silence in the room while he adjusted his glasses and looked about him. Minna was fortunately within foot's reach of her father, and restrained him from further comment for the present.

There was a certain difficulty, after this, in resuming conversation. The topic of Knarreby and its enviable " situation," in comparison with other less favoured spots, was again taken up, and the Professor was invited to express his opinion.

" Yes," he agreed. " Beautiful. Quite remarkably so. Woods running down right to the water's edge—beechwoods. Don't find them abroad so much. True Danish landscape."

" Just what I say," put in Lund eagerly. " Do you know what the editor wrote only this spring : ' The woods are our treasury, and should be guarded with care.' "

" Treasure," corrected Minna.

" Not a bit of it. Treasury, he said. We've two woods here "—Lund thrust his hands into his jacket pockets—" and they're as good as cash in hand."

Lund looked round in search of approval. Fru van Haag gave him an encouraging nod.

The Professor resumed, in a slightly altered tone :

" And the water, salt and bracing, and so clear. The steamer kept close in to land just outside here, and I could see the bottom all the way ; pure white sand

with coppery-blue starfish here and there. Wonderful! And brown weed growing up like thick violin strings, but soft and living. An altogether remarkable sight—I shall never forget it, I'm sure. And do you know?—in among the weeds were fish. Big fish, I assure you. I had my glasses on, and could see them. Eels, they were. I saw two or three of them, huge things, as thick as my wrist."

Fru van Haag and the Professor exchanged a glance of cordial understanding.

"Really? Remarkable! Most interesting!" cooed the listeners round. They drew themselves up in their chairs; the eels and starfish seemed as it were ennobled by this gracious notice on the part of a real Professor.

Hr. van Haag cleared his throat and began to speak, giving out his words slowly, one by one:

"Most remarkable thing I've ever seen is the fog they have in London. Imagine yourself shut up—what shall I call it?—rolled up in a huge mass of cotton-wool—damp, clammy cotton-wool, that chokes the breath out of you and blinds you. You can hear footsteps here and there, but never see a soul. You hear a cart coming along, and start to get out of the way, but can't see a yard this way or that, and dare not move a step. Terrible, I assure you. I walked with my hand stretched out in front of me, and three times I ran up against somebody else's hand—clammy hands like a corpse. And never saw a soul—I just happened to think of it now. . . ."

"Ah, Toldforvalteren, he's been everywhere you can think of," said little Lund, turning to the Professor. "If only some of us could have travelled about like that, eh? *London*—well, and why not? I know something about the place myself: '*London Fashion*'—

that's what it says inside the hats sometimes—it means, the same fashion that's fashionable in London."

Fru van Haag turned to her husband gently :

" Do tell us some more about your adventure in London, in the fog ? "

" Yes, do, please, Hr. van Haag—it's so exciting ! "

" No, really—I can't remember all the details. . . ."

" Yes—don't you remember, you got into a milliner's place at last, and sat in a back room nursing the baby while they went to fetch a cab for you ? "

Unearthly silence. Then Hr. van Haag's voice, almost too calmly protesting :

" You are making a mistake, my dear ; it was you, not me."

" Oh yes, of course, now I think of it. How very stupid of me ! Dreadful, I'm sure."

And Fruen's rich, deep voice choked in a whinnying laugh.

Now, what was she going on like this for, in such an affected fashion ? Did she imagine it was possible to make a skeleton blush, or close its dead eye-sockets ? A foolish notion on the part of wise Fru Clara. She ought not to have been surprised at her husband's thus annexing her London fog by a cold-blooded steal. He had done the same thing times out of number before—stolen her feelings and imagination, and repeated them as his own. Every word that he had heard her say at the time, when the experience was fresh in her mind. And now he kept the whole chamber of horrors in a sort of mummified condition, and served it up without winking on every possible occasion. Horrors ? Huh ! What did he know of horrors ? Would a skeleton be afraid of the dead ? He had been in London, of course, and

seen a fog, but he had certainly not paid any attention to it beyond putting on his galoshes and a mackintosh.

Said Postmaster Weisz: "Yes. . . . My wife and I were only in Norway once, but . . ."

"Oh, you with your Norway," cried Fru Weisz irritably. "Who do you suppose cares for Norway? Do you think the Professor would count Norway for travelling? And I'm sick of Norway. And the abominable coffee you get there. . . ."

"But we may be going with the van Haags to the South—to the Tyrol, you know," said her husband mildly.

"*Only* in Norway?" said the Professor. Whereupon Minna Lund struck in, with intense feeling:

"*I* simply *love* Norway! And, father, you know you've promised we should . . ."

"Promised—promised . . . a self-supporting young woman like you. . . . My daughter has eight or ten pupils of her own—singing lessons, you know. At one *Krone* the lesson."

"You sing, then, Frøken Lund?" put in Sveidal.

"Yes, she does. Ah, that woke you up, Engineer, what? Ten pupils at four *Kroner* a month—that's four hundred and eighty *Kroner* a year. Yes, young people nowadays . . ."

Minna responded to Hr. Sveidal with perfect correctness and not a trace of excitement:

"I sing a little, yes."

"A little!" came in protest from the company, her father included. He, of course, would be in a position to know.

"Frøken Minna must give us a song," commanded Fru van Haag.

Little Lund vetoed the motion. Seeing there was a

Professor of Music present, it would not become his daughter to thrust herself forward. He sat up stiffly in his chair and nodded decisively round, his brown eyes glittering behind his glasses. No; the Professor should play for them. Not a word! Honour where honour was due!

Now, as it happened, Professor Hans Juhl had been sitting in a state of dread, from the moment he entered the room, lest anyone should ask him to play. If they did, he would sternly refuse, and take himself off at once. He—play for an audience of four or five silly people? Never. He couldn't do it. But all this nervous inward struggle had sapped his strength. And as a result came the remarkable spectacle of Professor Hans Juhl, rising, on this single invitation, stroking his forehead, and crossing over at a sort of jog-trot to the piano in the adjoining cabinet, whither he had been gazing all the time as if hypnotised.

He sat down, his arms drooping limply at his sides. Then he played.

A short, brilliant piece, and his arms dropped limply again. But his audience of seven applauding, he came to life again, visibly encouraged, and nodded sideways in the confidential manner he affected on the concert platform. He felt, no doubt, as if the seven were a real audience—a crowded hall. Now he frowned—drawing down his eyebrows like a pair of shutters between himself and the world.

He played for a long while now, making no pauses, only nodded, rose, opened or lowered the cover—and played once more.

All was quiet around him. There was clapping when Hans Juhl let his arms drop, a sighing, and silence, that not a single note should be lost. Once, when he moved

a piece of music that lay near, Fru Clara leaned over to see what it was, and in doing so, forgot herself to the unheard-of extent of laying one hand on her husband's knee for support. Only for a second, then she withdrew her hand again. But Hr. van Haag remained sitting motionless till the music was over and past. From the little spot in the region of his knee-cap there went forth an electric current that sent thrills through his whole body, even to certain brain-cells. She had touched his knee! He pondered on the fact, and sought to draw from it conclusions of far-reaching consequence. Thus music may have power to charm even a publican.

Hans Juhl was all goodwill when he had finished. He wiped his forehead, smiled, and declared that Frøken Lund could not refuse them now. Not really—it was a dreadful mistake to have to be pressed. And, with a bow, he took her hand and led her to the instrument.

"No need to show off like that, Minna," said her father.

Minna sang a little song, and would have retired, but seeing that every one clapped, including the Professor himself, she delightedly bade them desist, and began looking through the pile of music.

"Oh, I'm afraid there are no songs there," said Fru Clara, rising.

"Yes, yes; I saw some before—here!"

She opened the book and sang. It was Schubert. Hr. Sveidal stood up, with a creaking of gaiters, and placed himself immediately behind her.

"You sing, too, Hr. Sveidal?" she asked between two *Lieder*, bending her head back towards him.

Hr. Sveidal could not deny that he sang a little—but nothing, really, compared to herself.

Little Lund was altogether beside himself by now;

he stretched out one foot and kicked the Professor on the shin, pointing with head and one thumb at the pair.

Yes, really, it was Hr. Sveidal's turn now, declared Minna. Hr. Sveidal really must.

" No, no—they were all too high. But perhaps . . ."

Then it was seen that Minna had eyes like fish-hooks ; she thrust a hand into the darkness of the music cabinet—here were some duets. She was sure Hr. Sveidal could take the lower part.

" Well, yes, a little. . . ."

Followed duets, upon the theme of Love and other themes, until the company sat with aching hands—possibly also ears. Lund ceased his demonstrative action of the thumb, and yawned slightly. The engineer had a curious faculty of making all melodies seem uniform.

But the duettists thanked each other and agreed it was lovely. " And surely you know that one ? Oh, but you ought to learn it. Come round to-morrow, do," said Minna.

The party broke up, with effusively reiterated farewells and thanksgivings.

Hr. Sveidal helped Minna on with her things. Lund stood watching them, and blinking his eyes, but tore himself away. There was one thing he must ask.

" Where's the Professor got to ? " he asked, tramping through with his crackling raincoat into the room again.

" Oh, here you are. Here, I wanted to ask you. Do you know Georg Brandes ? "

" No," said the Professor.

" What ? But he's a professor, too ! "

" Is he ? Still, I'm afraid . . ."

" Because I'm an adherent of his ! "

" Really ? " said the Professor, and snapped open his pince-nez case for a last glance at the little man.

Hedvig came in to report that the guest-chamber was ready, whereupon Fruen took the Professor's arm and led him to his room.

" Well, now," he said, " I can't manage a change of clothes," pointing to his little handbag, " but a clean collar. . . ." He opened the bag and fumbled about in it for some time, without success. " Well, there now ! My wife always puts out a collar and a pair of clean cuffs for me on the bed, but—in a word, they're not here now. Does this look very bad ? "

" Well, yes, rather. But we'll see what Hedvig can do.—Hedvig, just a minute. Look here, Hedvig, what do you mean by not having a collar laid out for the Professor ? What a thoughtless creature you are, to be sure ! "

" Oh, how stupid of me ! " said Hedvig penitently. " I'm dreadfully sorry."

" So you ought to be ! "

And a moment later came Hedvig proffering a sheaf of glistening white collars.

" But the cuffs, woman ! " cried the Professor, starting threateningly towards her. " Do you expect ıe to sit down to fried eels in *these* ? "

" I have them," said Hedvig, springing to the door. But next time, instead of coming in, she handed in the cuffs from outside.

" Come in, lovely thing, and let me thank you properly."

" Certainly, Hr. Professor. I've some more things here, if you care about these now ? "

And there stood Hedvig with Hr. Toldforvalteren's full-dress uniform on its stand—it looked like the image

of a saint carried in procession—or say Hr. van Haag himself emerging from beneath a steam-roller, in gold-embroidered breeches, gilt sword, and three-cornered hat.

" I *like* that girl," said the Professor.

After supper, which turned out entirely to the Professor's satisfaction, Fru Clara was left alone with him for a moment. He looked at her and asked suddenly :

" Was that the musical monstrosity I was to meet ? "

" Who ? "

" The lady who sang such a lot."

" No, it wasn't. But what did you think of her ? "

" H'm. Voice—well, plenty of it. But I'm glad she wasn't the one. To tell the truth, if there's one thing more than another I do detest, it's affectation."

" Oh no ; the monstrosity's a painter, who hasn't learned a note."

" Bring him along, then," said Hans Juhl, rubbing his white hands together with a satisfied air.

" No, I want you to myself this evening. But to-morrow, if you would—thanks."

She wrote a few lines on a visiting-card, put it in an envelope, and called Hedvig in.

" A letter to go, Hedvig. This evening, please."

" To the post ? "

" No, by hand. You can take it round yourself."

Hedvig glanced at the address, blushed a fiery red, and left the room.

Take it round herself—certainly not. She could send one of the boys playing about outside. Still, there must be something particular in the letter, so that Johan Fors would understand her mistress had *told* her to bring it herself. And perhaps it was urgent. Possibly

there might be something in it far too important to entrust to a casual street boy. Still . . . Hedvig came to the conclusion that she would send a boy, after all. But she put on her best jacket and the smart little cap her mistress had given her. She twisted round in front of the glass—yes, it suited her, that cap. There was a sort of breezy freshness about it.

She went out on to the steps in front of the house. The shouts of children at play echoed among the tall buildings. Hedvig picked out a youngster who was clambering up into an empty goods waggon on a siding. Would he deliver a letter? Good, then; here. She took him alone and explained very carefully that the letter was to be delivered to the addressee in person—given into his own hands, that is.

"And if he's not there, then—well, then you must find out where he is, and go and find him. Here's five *Øre*. You'll be coming back here to play, won't you? Then you'd better come and let me know you've delivered it safely. I'll give you something more when you come back. You'll find me here."

She had one hand on the boy's slight warm neck, guiding him in and out between the metals of the sidings, and still holding the important letter. She did not like to let it go till the last minute.

And then, after the boy had repeated his instructions and she had given them again, who should appear but Johan Fors himself, striding out from a narrow alley close by.

Hedvig forgot all about the boy—almost forgot to breathe—but stepped straight across the line to Johan. "*Godaften!* How lucky you happened to come along! I've a letter for you here from Fru van Haag. I was just telling Oscar here where to take it. . . ."

Johan Fors was carrying a violin case—a real one, newly varnished and shining.

" Thanks," he said, with a smile. Then he set down the violin case with the greatest care on the toes of his boots, took out a big pocket-book, and put the letter away without so much as glancing at the address. " You might have brought it yourself ! "

This was an enormous mark of favour. Hedvig made no answer, but turned and walked down with Johan Fors towards the harbour.

" Oh, I forgot. Here, Oscar, I promised you two *Øre* extra, didn't I ? " The boy had followed them without a word. " There ! Now run away and play with the others."

Hedvig and Johan were alone.

Hedvig turned her head and saw that Johan was laughing as he walked. This was nice ; Hedvig laughed herself. But then he stopped. It must have been the letter, then, he was so pleased about it. Ah, well . . .

But she could not go along like this and say nothing. What should she say ? All that came into her head seemed stiff and unnatural. Anyhow, she must make a start.

" Are you going off somewhere to play ? "

" Yes. Ye—es." Johan managed to charge the word with deep and mysterious meaning. He nodded, too, with like effect.

" It must be lovely to be able to play. I play the piano, of course, a bit. But not really, like you."

" Well, I suppose it is—but why ? "

" Oh, because you know it pleases other people."

" H'm. I know one person who wasn't pleased once. Said no, when I offered to play."

Hedvig drew herself up and said in her firmest voice :

" It's really very stupid of you, Johan Fors, to make such a fuss about that night. Perhaps I ought to have let you come up to my room, even if it was the middle of the night, and I should have lost my place for a certainty."

" What's a trifle like that compared to . . ."

" Well, I *say*, perhaps I ought to have done as you said. But if it was wrong of me, do you think it's right of you to be so—so bloodthirsty in revenge ? Is it *manly*, now ? "

Yes. Johan did. But there was an unmistakable hesitation in his voice as he said so.

" It seems to me it's stupid to waste a whole summer because of a little thing like that." Hedvig realised the moment she had spoken that she had made an unfortunate choice of words, but now it was too late.

" Waste ! Huh ! I haven't wasted anything."

" Yes, you have—you've wasted and spoiled a good deal for me," said Hedvig adroitly. " But, tell me honestly, now—would you rather I—I didn't go with you any farther ? "

They were nearly at the harbour now. Johan had a boat lying moored at a tiny landing-stage close by. He was going out on one of his well-known mysterious excursions, to play to himself somewhere all alone. Since that conversation with Fru van Haag he had practised with feverish zeal. He had bought an instruction book, learned his notes, and a great deal more. The Professor should not find him altogether an ignoramus. He had thought now to walk down with Hedvig as far as the Toldbod, leave her there, and go down to his boat ; for to a nature such as his it was intolerable to appear anything short of perfection in the eyes of

another. It was thus most inconvenient that Hedvig should bring up the question of accompanying him farther just in that way. She wanted to go with him. It was no use, then, his thinking of seeing her back to the house. He forgot how often he had longed for but a few moments' talk with her. He was irritated at the momentary interruption of his plan. Nevertheless, her clear words had not been without their effect, and he strove to repress his ill-feeling.

"Go with me? Yes, why not? But I'm going out here," he pointed with his violin case.

"Out in the boat, yes. But can't I go with you, and hear you play?"

Play—huh! Johan had no thought of *playing* this evening. He was going out to a hut in the woods to *practise*—learning to follow the silly black dots called notes. The Professor had already arrived—there was no time to be lost. Practise this evening, he must. Surely it must be the devil himself that had sent the girl with this idea of hers just now!

"Well, all right, then. Come along!"

He walked on ahead down the landing-stage and entered the boat. Hedvig stood at the edge as if in thought. She saw how he carried his violin case, holding it as carefully as if it had been a child, and set it down under the middle seat. Soft rings showed on the water round at every movement he made. Now he was taking his coat off, ready to row.

"Hurry up with you!" he commanded, sitting up.

The bow of the little boat was rocking up and down a few feet only from where she stood. It was tempting . . . just the slightest little spring, taking off with her left foot, and on board. She knew how easily and surely she could do it; knew how the boat would give under

her and recover; she had known that feel of a boat since she was a child. It could not be fear that held her back. But . . . there was Johan, laying his coat carefully about the new violin case—and he had only a grudging, unfriendly word for her. Not even a hand outstretched to help her on board. No, this was not the joy she had looked for.

"Well, why don't you come?"

"Good-bye, Johan Fors," said the girl quietly. Then, turning, she walked slowly in towards land. She could see the ripples from the boat following her as she went. But when she reached the big flat stones at the end of the planks, she lifted her head and strode firmly up.

Johan sat for a moment looking after her. The boat made no ripples now. Then he flung his hat down on the bottom boards, cast loose, and sent the boat tearing through the water.

XII

FRU VAN HAAG had slept but poorly after all the music of the afternoon. When Hedvig came into the bedroom at ten, she sat up and looked round confusedly, frowning instinctively in readiness for battle.

" Oh, it's only you," she said in relief. " Is it awfully late ? Ten o'clock ? Good heavens, child ! Don't say the Professor's up already ? What ? Well, get everything ready for him—but you mustn't mind if he's a bit irritable in the morning. He doesn't mean it. *What's* that ? A man ? To see me ? As if we hadn't had enough people bothering lately ! Johan Fors ? Heavens, yes, I told him myself to come at ten. Oh, well, it's not a matter of life and death. You can look after him till I'm ready. Ask him in, anywhere you like, and talk to him. What ? Nonsense—are you in my service, or are you not ? Then do as I bid you, miss, if you please. Go out and entertain Johan Fors ! This moment—do you hear ! "

Hedvig did her best to draw up the corners of her mouth and make her eyes to twinkle as in mirth. She succeeded far enough to give her mistress the impression that all was well. Then, going out, she ushered Johan Fors into the drawing-room, and left him there.

Fru Clara took her time. It was half-past ten when she came out into the corridor, just as the Professor was passing.

"Morning, my dear lady. Yes, you were right; he *is* a beast."

"Oh, so you've seen him? Yes, he is a beast, isn't he? I said so in my letter," whispered Fru Clara.

"Ah, but you said a *remarkable* beast. And that, my dear lady, was an exaggeration."

Fru Clara noted that the Professor was in a difficult mood, and merely answered:

"Come along, tea's ready. But we must invite the beast, you know."

"Oh, by all means; only, in that case we shan't invite me. Or, if we do, I shan't come."

"Don't tell me Hans Juhl's turned out a snob," said Fru van Haag with conviction. She led the way into the drawing-room, and the Professor, after a moment's hesitation, followed.

But Fruen could not deny even to herself that she found Johan Fors' appearance disappointing. She had imagined him in his painting-smock, spotted with all the colours of a meadow in spring, with his broad-brimmed hat for choice, and a smeary paint-pot in one hand. And now—here he was in ready-made, rather ill-fitting clothes of an indefinite greenish tint, with a cheap metal watch-chain, and collar and cuffs of aggressive vulgarity. On the chair beside him was a black bowler hat, a stiff, unbending "Sunday best." And what, perhaps, was worst of all, the old, worn fox-skin bag that had seemed so romantic was now replaced by a wooden violin case with nickel clasps.

Fie, Johan! The one hope of salvation lay in the chance that he might be coarse and amusing over his tea. The Professor was the sort of man who would do anything for those who amused him. But no; here again Fru Clara was disappointed. Johan took his tea

with a trembling hand, just like any other bashful young man. He ate but little, possibly he had taken care to fill up before coming out. The only saving feature was the enormous quantity of cream he took—but that was hardly enough in itself to create a success. Even his golden mane of hair had been washed and combed and plastered down out of all recognition.

" Thanks ! "

" *Tak for Te.*" " *Velbekomme !* "

The Professor thrust his chair back, looked up with an expression of helplessness, rose and walked to the window and back once or twice, put on his glasses, and cast a pleading glance at Fru Clara's face, but finding no mercy there, said, with sudden harshness :

" Well, start away ! I'm ready ! "

Johan opened his case with a smart click of the nickel clasps, and hoping Fruen and the Professor would not fail to remark the splendid red cloth inside the case. Apparently they did not notice it. Johan was abashed, and did not dare to acknowledge that he had once thought of getting the Professor to write out the music he composed. An awe-inspiring glance he had, that same Professor. It was something like the glance of that eye painted above the altar. If the rehearsal were to be a success, Johan felt he must get a little farther out of range.

He took up his violin and bow. And as he did so, a thought more terrible than all the rest came to his mind : Hedvig ! Hedvig would hear every note ! She could crush him to earth with her scorn if it went off badly.

" Play ! " commanded the Professor.

No—no—he couldn't. Not here. He dared not even touch the strings to tune them.

" If you'll allow me . . ." he began, twisting the

instrument round and round in his hands, " I'd like to ask—if the Professor wouldn't rather go over in the church and hear me there ? "

" *What ?* In church ! Did you say in the church ? "

" Yes. It sounds better there, so if . . ."

" What the devil do you mean, man ? " cried the Professor furiously, snapping open his glasses in a fury.

" I mean, you can't hear properly here ; if we hadn't better go over to the church. I've got the key. And we'd be more by ourselves there."

" Are you an organist ? "

" No."

" Or the parish clerk, perhaps ? "

Fruen interposed hastily, " I told you, Professor, you know. He's painting the church inside."

" Appointed by the Town Council," put in Johan modestly.

" And I suppose you'd like to stand and play in front of the altar and have us sit in the pews to listen ? "

" No ; I generally play in the pulpit," said Johan, twirling his violin once more.

The Professor stood for a moment glancing from Fru Clara to Johan and back again. Errant memories crowded in upon him. Oh, but he understood thoroughly how Fru Clara had entered into all this ! She had always had a knack of creating a sensation anywhere. He called to mind strange things from the Consul's, her home in Helsingør. Delightful things—most amusing things. He himself, moreover, had played a leading part in some of them. . . . But . . .

No ! It would not do. He was Professor Hans Juhl now, with a reputation in his own country and one or two others. No sensation, no cheap advertisement

should sully his name. For who could be sure but that something might leak out about this unprecedented church concert ?

" *No !* " he said, stamping his little feet on the carpet. " I'll give you two minutes, Master Painter. If you want to play, play, and I'll hear you. If not—why, it's all the same to me ! "

" Of course he will play," said Fruen, with a glance of hypnotic force at Johan.

" Well, then, you'll have to go into the other room, at least. I can't . . ."

The Professor took a step forward as if about to strike, but Fru van Haag turned him round, took his arm, and led him into the adjoining cabinet. And there she held him prisoner for half an hour while Johan played his masterpieces.

Strange tones poured through to them as they listened. What Fruen had heard that evening in the church was as nothing to what he now conjured up.

A simple little melody at first, then repeated ; it was easy to follow and recognise again. Like a fair-haired woman, it was. What now ? The woman lets down her hair ; see, she is sitting by a rushing river ; her reflection is there, quivering as with emotion in the water. Singing, she walks along the bank between white birches. And now—now the king of the water-sprites reaches out his mighty arm and draws her to him. A hellish roar of foaming waters, falling rocks, crashing trees ; an avalanche of sound. . . .

Johan was scraping away on all four strings at once. The Professor set his glasses straight and studied a painting of some hyacinths in a vase.

Silence. Out of the rushing flood glides the little melody—the fair-haired woman. Lovely in death she

glides along by the green banks of the stream under white birches. . . .

The music died away in tones as delicate as moonlight.

The Professor took down the painting from the wall and carried it to the window, peering to find the artist's signature.

A flurry of varied notes.

" What's this one called ? " cried Fruen.

" It's from Budapest," answers the painter, without stopping.

" Sounds like it," says Fruen, with a nod.

The Professor hangs up the picture on its nail again.

A new piece now, with howls and roaring and nameless sounds.

" And this ? "

" Last winter. Ice in the Belt," answers Johan.

" Sounds like it," says Fruen again, with a nod and a triumphant glance at the Professor, who yawns slightly.

" Now for ' the Church,' " says Johan. And with bow and strings he builds a mighty vault above him, full of air a-quiver with the tones of an organ and the clang of heavy bells.

" This is beautiful," says Fru Clara, steadfastly ignoring the Professor's expression, which is unpleased and unpleasing as ever.

Johan has evidently gained courage from his playing ; after a few rustic dances and a thing he calls " The Harbour," he tunes up again with a stubborn, self-satisfied air. Then he falls to on a piece which Fruen recognises as Schumann's " Abendlied." There are mutilations here and there ; she sits down, placing herself between the Professor and the door, in case of any

murderous onslaught from that quarter. As a matter of fact, she would rather see the glow of murderous lust in his eyes than boredom and yawning and sudden interest in paintings on the walls. If the feeling were only there, it might be kept down and converted to something else.

"What do you call that?" asks the Professor suddenly.

"Anemones in the woods," answers Johan, and goes on playing.

Ha! Now it is coming! The Professor comes closer, with little, energetic steps. No, my good Hans Juhl, you're not going to get past!

But what is this? Hans Juhl stops, bends over, and whispers something. What on earth . . . what *is* he talking about?

"Think that girl Hedvig could manage a fowl for dinner?"

Intolerable music-murderer! So this was what was going on inside his musical soul—the finest judge of music in the kingdom! Fru Clara rose, with a sigh, went through into the next room, and conveyed to Johan with many thanks that that would do. The Professor would think over it, and let him know.

Johan inquired if he could not speak to the Professor now.

"Quite impossible," said Fruen, with a wave of the hand, which somehow managed to invest the matter with an air of mystery.

Johan wiped his forehead, first with his sleeve, then with a neatly folded handkerchief, laid his instrument back in his case, drew himself up manfully, took his leave, wiped his feet carefully on the Smyrna carpet, and went out.

" I could have let him know at once just as well," said the Professor.

" I won't hear a word till after lunch ! Come along, we're going out for a walk. Through the town, or out in the woods somewhere. And talk of old times. I want to put you in a good humour."

" Silly nonsense," snarled the Professor. " I've made up my mind, and it won't be altered."

" Come along," said Fruen, wrapping him in her smile.

They walked through the town, where people rushed to the windows to stare at them, with an expression of curiosity almost amounting to terror ; here was a real Professor walking through the streets of Knarreby. All knew it ; even Etatsraaden, who came along with his big dog at his heels, turned round after he had passed and murmured to himself, with embellishments, that it really was the Professor.

Lund the draper came out in the middle of the street with some paper in his hand.

" *Goddag*, Hr. Professor—Hr. Professor of Music, I should say. You've written two large compositions and several smaller ones—yes, we know you well enough. And you know me, of course."

" No, I don't," snapped the Professor.

Lund turned pale, and stammered out :

" I—I was wearing a different suit . . ."

" Oh, it was you, was it ? " said the Professor, answering grudgingly to the pressure on his arm.

" Ah, I knew you'd remember me," said Lund gratefully. " You took a peep at me now and again, especially just as I was going. Yes, I swear you did—I saw it. Saw it in the looking-glass outside in the hall. Didn't know him, did you—the other professor ? But here's

a cutting from a paper—a thing he wrote. Read it. Yes, take it; I'll make you a present of it. Read it yourself. He's a first-rate chap, is Georg."

The Professor stood with the paper fluttering in his hand, utterly at a loss. But Fru Clara took it, folded it up neatly, and put it in his pocket.

"Oh, but won't you come in?" urged Lund. "Yes, do, now."

"No, thanks very much. No . . ."

"Fru Haag, do make him. *You've* been in my shop before, now, haven't you?"

"No, really, Hr. Lund, I'm afraid we can't . . ."

"Can't? Oh, but really, you know. Just step inside for a moment, so I can say the Professor's been here. No, don't think I'm reckoning on doing business; never entered my head, I assure you. Though, to be sure, there'd be no harm done, as a business man. . . . No, I assure you, nothing but the purest motives. Wine and cut glass all ready set out in the office at the back. And in case you'd care to go upstairs, my daughter's just bought two of your pieces at Dahlberg's. He sells music too, you know. Two lovely, dainty little pieces with a lyre and the name, 'Hans Juhl' . . . and really worth the money."

"*Farvel*, Hr. Lund," said Fruen.

"Oh, well, if you won't . . . *Farvel*, Fru Haag. But it's your fault, you know, that he won't come in. He'd like to, I know, and upstairs too. I can see it in his face. Wouldn't you, now, Hr. Juhl? Shake your head—yes, but it's only out of politeness, I know. You're a man that knows what good breeding is, Hr. Juhl. But that collar of yours is two sizes too small. Read that cutting I gave you—you can let me have it back any time. I collect them, you know. Sørensen,

he collects too—says they'll be worth a pot of money one day. Fru Haag 'll tell you about Sørensen."

"Thanks," said Hans Juhl, when they had walked on a little way. "Thanks for keeping me out of *that*. I can't stand any more beasts to-day."

They continued their way up to Stationsvej, with the elms on either side. A wet, rich autumn breeze came in from the Belt.

"Like the Sound at Helsingør," said the Professor.

"Oh, you think so, too?" said Fru Clara joyfully.

"Well, you're here, you know. And I come by boat to visit you. What can that mean but that Knarreby's Helsingør and Jutland over there is Sweden?"

"There's more of Helsingør here that you haven't seen yet. Look at that little house we're just coming to now."

"More of Helsingør? How—you mean some one else owns it? Who's that, now?"

"You'd never guess. Do you remember Kasper Egholm? He lives there now. We'll go in and look him up."

"Kasper Egholm!" The Professor stopped suddenly. "No, not really? Heavens—it positively hurts my head to think back as far as that. He was the smartest of us all, and the one you favoured most. *We* looked down on him, I remember, because he served in a shop. But we could see he was a devil of a fellow, really, and we hated him because you saw it too. What was it happened, after all? I only know one fine day he'd disappeared. How's the world been using him since then?"

"How does the world generally use us?" said Fru Clara.

" Well, I mean, has he grown handsomer, like you, or rounder, like me, or . . ."

" Come in and see for yourself."

" No—here, wait a minute. Tell me first—what *is* he now ? The house looks a funny sort of place when you get close up. He's not a grocer now, is he ? There's something that looks like a sign on the door there. What is he ? "

" What is he ? He's a photographer ; but, apart from that, he's the same devil of a fellow that he used to be. I wouldn't change him for *anyone.* The house is his own—and, look now—he's going to sell it very shortly, and be a rich man. Possibly he may buy an estate in the country. But come along, we'd better turn back now. We must get home and see what Hedvig's got for lunch. Did I tell you, by the way, that Hedvig's his daughter—Egholm's ? "

The Professor felt relieved as they turned back, but felt instinctively that Fruen was displeased at his refusal. He endeavoured to make up for it now by praising Hedvig.

" Aha ! Now I understand where she got that air of hers, and the eyes too. It'll be interesting to see her again, now I know."

" Yes," said Fru van Haag, artfully seizing her chance, "and, as it happens, she's in love with Johan Fors."

" Very sorry, I'm sure, but . . ."

" Remember—not a word till after lunch ! "

Hr. van Haag and the Professor never met except at meals. All this talk about music bored Hr. van Haag beyond endurance. With others, he could manage well enough with his London fog and similar reminiscences, but with the Professor, his voice sounded

curiously vague and hollow. One thing, however, he did to maintain respect for himself: he changed his clothes three times a day, and even appeared sometimes in his new uniform. But what difference did that make? He sat as stiff and silent as before. No one bowed down before his magnificence. The Professor only took out his glasses when the piano was called into requisition.

Worst of all to Hr. van Haag was when these two began talking gaily together, with bursts of laughter over things and people utterly unknown to himself. At such times he would make pretence of being busy at the office, and rising, hold out his hand condescendingly, which done, he would walk round to Vang's hotel, order a glass of tea with rum, and enter into interesting conversation with the housekeeper, Fru Vang, old Vang's daughter-in-law. She had formerly kept a boarding-house of her own, and was now engaged by the new Company for exploitation of the tourist market. She was clever in matters relating to food and drink, and, as mentioned, "interesting" to talk to. She would talk to Hr. van Haag of the serving maidens—their serving, it appeared, was indifferent, and their maidenly virtue negligible or nil. Of the gas bill, that she had managed to bring down to three *Kr.* less than last time. Of anchovies that some diner had complained about, and the dealer who refused to exchange the tin. Of her husband, who had gone out fishing one day and got drunk on the way out and drowned on the way back—and was now, perhaps, or perhaps more likely not, among the blest. Then by a happy transition to the subject of church—she had noticed Hr. Toldforvalteren in church last Sunday. Then on again to the question of religion and conversion and other remarkable things. Hr. van Haag contributed a remarkable experience

of his own in London once, in one of the London fogs. . . .

He had walked like this—with his hands held out in front. And encountered other hands . . . thus . . .

Here he encountered—very gently—the hands of Fru Vang herself, and she grasped his and gave the least little delicate pressure before releasing them again with a laugh and a smart little slap—not in the least with any unkindly feeling towards Hr. Toldforvalteren, and he on his part was far from taking it unkindly. Fru Vang was not exactly young, but she wore very high heels, which gave her a sort of confidential, forward stoop. Hr. van Haag had noticed it, and found it pleasing. Also, she wore her hair cut straight down over her forehead.

Meanwhile, Fru van Haag found the moment opportune for eliciting the Professor's opinion with regard to Johan Fors.

"Well," said Hans Juhl thoughtfully, picking up his glass and rolling the last drop of his liqueur on to his tongue, "tell me first of all: am I a humbug or am I not?"

"Far from it, my dear old friend."

"Good!—I only wanted you to admit it before it was too late. For—mark my words—you can be angry if you like, or call me an ungrateful thing or what you please, but—Johan Fors will get no advancement out of me!"

"Need you be so hard on him for stealing that little thing of Schumann's? All the rest was original."

"It was all stolen—every bit of it."

"That won't do, Hans Juhl! If so, whose was it? Names and titles, please, at once!"

"I'm glad I got you to admit before that I'm no

humbug. I *can't say* who were the composers—and yet it was all stolen, none the less. It simply comes to this—the fellow has a good ear—a splendid ear—and he picks up music here, there, and everywhere. Then, when he gets home, he takes his fiddle and plays over what's stuck in his head. But—he plays it wrong! And that's how his works are composed!"

"I can hardly believe it's that."

"I found it hard to believe it myself. For the first ten minutes I fancied he really was an artist—there's something of the artist in him certainly, but"—the Professor made a grimace—"his 'compositions' are absolutely worthless; worse than worthless, really, for they would hamper him unspeakably during the long years of hard work—and anyhow, he's too old to begin that now. In a word—nothing to be done. I'm rather annoyed at his not having stolen something from you, dear Fru Clara, and edited it the same way—you'd understand me better if he had."

Fru Clara raised her head as if to speak, but checked herself, and sat drumming with the fingers of her left hand. Then she sighed—she understood now.

Two days later the Professor went away again, almost as abruptly as he had come, leaving the Toldbod quiet and empty after him. Hedvig and he had become great friends. He ordered her in at times from the kitchen to the piano, helped her in a fatherly way, stormed at her, and ended by praising her beyond all bounds. He gave her pieces of music, and when he had gone, there was a ten-*Kroner* note impaled on one of her hatpins. It could not be from anyone but himself.

Fruen called Hedvig in, and said:

"Hedvig, you saw and heard Johan Fors when he

was here the other day. Now, I've an important message for him. Would you like to deliver it yourself ? "

" No," said Hedvig.

" Don't be so quick to say no. It's a message he won't be at all pleased to get, so there's every likelihood of his being glad of some one to console him."

" I'm sorry, but I *can't* go to him for a message."

" Has anything happened ? "

" I don't care about him any more."

Fru van Haag looked long and searchingly at the girl's face as she stood there, fair and upright as ever. Then, with all the brightness she could muster in her voice, she endeavoured to dispel the youthful disappointment.

" Oh, don't you ? But *I do* ! And he shan't have just a letter that would still leave a host of little questions in his mind without an answer. I'll go and find him in the church myself, or wherever he's to be found."

Hedvig sighed, and merely answered, " Oh, very well. . . ." Then she returned to her work.

Fruen found no one in the church but a lad, who, on being questioned, believed that Johan had gone back to the workshop. Thither she went, and, sure enough, there was Johan at work on a small cart. But his master was close by, painting a chest of drawers. Both took off their hats, and Johan came towards her with a smile.

The master stooped down again to his work, but with his ears cocked suspiciously in the direction of the pair.

" May I put on a coat and go along now ? " said Johan, with his good smile. And, stepping lightly across the shop, he opened a heavily painted wooden door and entered his room. There was a wardrobe there,

and a very rough sort of bed; Fruen wondered how ever anyone could sleep with all that smell of paint about. On the walls were a couple of paintings, unframed; what they represented it was impossible to see in the faint light. But when Johan opened the wardrobe, Fruen could see, on the inner side of the door, a sheet of card with a drawing in black chalk. She went a few steps nearer, saying by way of pretext, "Don't bother to put on a collar!" And now she could see that the girl there was Hedvig; her face to the life, with the same light in her eyes, and her hair just as it was; there was even something of Hedvig's upright bearing in the pose. And in the front of the dress was the little brooch Fru van Haag had given her herself the first day.

Johan slammed the wardrobe door to, and came through into the shop again, buttoning his coat as he walked. Then, without a word to his master, he followed Fruen out into the street.

They walked along past some little gardens, with wide expanse of stubble fields on the other side.

"It's nothing very pleasant I've got to tell you," said Fruen.

"No, I guessed as much. The Professor didn't like my things?"

"It wasn't that exactly. . . ." Fru van Haag was not generally lacking in firmness, but she had seen that picture of Hedvig—unquestionably a work of art—and a new plan had come into her head. This man must not be spurned aside. But . . . How could it be managed? It was his right to know the truth. "The Professor did not consider your work original," she said kindly and calmly.

"Does he think it was part of it stolen?" said Johan.

"Well, since you say so yourself. . . ."

Johan shivered.

"Stolen!" he gasped. "Stolen, my pieces that I made up myself? Not a note of it was ever stolen!"

"Look here, Johan Fors, I like your music immensely. If not, I should never have asked Hans Juhl down here. But—you can't say *you* wrote Schumann's 'Abendlied,' now, can you?"

Johan stared, open-mouthed.

"The last one you played when the Professor was here. You called it 'Anemones in the Wood.'"

Johan turned pale. "I must have forgotten, then. I can't remember everything in the world. I've made up over a hundred pieces myself, but I've heard thousands and thousands. Is it any wonder if I made a mistake? I've been in all those countries down in the south, out every evening somewhere—when I was at work, that is; I mean, when I had any money—at concerts every evening. Music was the only thing I cared about. I was eighteen weeks in Vienna. Stolen! I don't steal."

He had spoken brokenly, the sentences tumbling over one another. Suddenly he seemed to lose his breath. He held both hands to his face, turned away, and leaned his forehead against a tree. Some gleaners in the field—a woman and two girls—stood up and looked in wonder at the two.

"Listen to me," said Fru Clara, with evident sympathy in her voice. "That wasn't all he said—the Professor. He said there was something of an artist in you. Most certainly, he said. And he didn't mean anything dishonourable in saying the things were stolen. But he thought your powers could perhaps be better

used in some other form of art. Painting pictures, for instance."

Johan turned a haggard face towards her, and asked :

" The Professor—does he know anything about things besides music ? "

" Indeed, he does. And I know a great deal about both. I've even painted a picture myself, once—some hyacinths in a vase, and it hangs on the wall at home now. I think you might become a clever artist. And the Professor and I will help you, as far as we can. But come along now ; people are looking at us."

So, under Fru Clara's magic touch, Johan turned joyful and confident. He drew out his pocket-book, and gave her the drawings it contained ; he would bring some more to-morrow—bigger things, better things altogether. And when he left her at the foot of the Toldbod steps, his strong teeth gleamed in a great smile. His flourishing farewell was all that a woman could desire ; when Fruen looked down from the window above the steps, he was still standing there, with his hat in one hand at his side, and the breeze flinging his yellow locks this way and that.

Hr. van Haag had already sat down to table when Fru Clara entered. He had found voice again, and talked, to nobody in particular, of many things.

". . . And they're getting up a collection—for the further decoration of the church. I've given two *Kroner* from you and two from me. And I've promised to let a few ladies meet here now and again to work at an altar cloth. Fru Vang, from the hotel, will be coming up one day soon to arrange with you about it. A most intelligent woman—a woman of culture."

Not a word said Fru van Haag by way of answer, though she heard it all well enough. It was a blessing

to be occupied with her own affairs. Oh, and there were so many things to be done. But why this last, that would mean both trouble and money? Well, it was only reasonable that Hedvig should have a decent husband. She didn't care about him as he was now; well, then, he must be altered to suit her. It could, and should, be done.

Fruen wrote many letters during the next few days; also, she went off somewhere on a journey. When she returned Johan's affairs were well on the way; he had been granted admission to the Academy as a non-paying student, and was to start at once.

Engineer Sveidal had been to Egholm, and had made no objection to the sum of 7000 *Kroner* demanded. Far from it; he considered it a very reasonable sum. The business could not be concluded on the spot, but there was every prospect of its coming off. He would talk to the Minister about it, he said graciously.

So that altogether Fru van Haag had reason to be pleased. And she was. She shone like a sun over the whole town. Fishing-wives left unprovided for, lamplighters' children, Madam Hermansen with the troublesome leg and the never-weary mouth, the char-creature Malle Duse with her brief, sad song—these and many others were regular visitors in Fru Clara's and Hedvig's kitchen, where there was something to be found for each and all.

And Fru van Haag went late to bed at nights and fell asleep with ease, deaf to the dull meanderings of a voice from across the room. All was well.

Then one day in the winter Hedvig came in and said she wished to leave. Of course, it was an awkward time to change now, but she could get a friend to come in her place, if Fruen would let her. She'd just got

the chance of a good place in Jutland. Not meaning she wanted to go at once, of course, but . . .

Fruen dropped her hands in her lap.

" A good place, Hedvig. You mean, you know the people ? "

" No, but it was in the paper. ' As one of the family ' and all. A veterinary surgeon."

" Then you've applied for it already ? "

" Yes, and got an answer ; I can . . . but, of course, only if you don't mind. And Dagmar could come instead of me—she's much cleverer, really."

" Well," said Fruen, with difficulty, " I suppose you must go—yes, of course. But we must fit you out first, my dear. The little old lady from the little red house can come round and do the sewing. And we'll go along to Lund's to-morrow morning. Have you a trunk and things ? A chest of drawers ? Oh, but you must have a proper travelling-trunk. The yellow one of mine with the handles, you know—you can have that. Don't talk nonsense, child. We can't have you going to a new place like a gipsy from nowhere. What would your new people think of me ? "

A busy fortnight followed, and then—Hedvig was gone. It was Dagmar who stood by the stove and moved about the rooms. Dagmar it was, beyond question.

The new year that followed seemed, as it were, still-born. No tourists. No solution of the railway problem. Hardly even ships in the harbour. And who worked at the painting of the church ? Two miserable apprentice lads, whose work was not worth craning one's neck back to see. The Weiszs' proposed holiday trip with the van Haags had to be given up, owing to the sudden

indisposition of Fru van Haag, who found herself obliged to stay in bed. True, the indisposition evanesced as soon as the holiday plan was given up. But what difference did that make ?

Egholm in his villa in Stationsvej had to wait for his country mansion ; and his former religion had taught him to meet such delays with dignity and calm. Fru Egholm did not mourn. She dug and weeded in her garden, and thought it a paradise on earth. For it must not be forgotten that neither sun nor rain, neither roses nor lilies nor the scented honeysuckle were in the least degree stillborn. Nor was there anything to complain of about her boy Emanuel at his high-class school. Emanuel was growing almost beyond her of late. When they were alone he would at times give voice in strange tongues, and refer quite calmly to such things as $\pi\frac{r^2}{2}\cdot\sqrt{3}$. His mother nodded mutely, and gave him sweets and money ; she had a fervent admiration for the marvels of science. Afterwards, she could pass on to her simplicity, the things she had thus learned, to the neighbours, or to Fru van Haag. Two sons she had now, both incomprehensible beings—but both with hearts of the purest gold—for Sivert, too, now wrote more and more in English. His experiences and adventures were manifold—and not all of a character to be passed on to silly people, who might misconstrue his words and actions.

Often, in her dreams, Fru Egholm heard a sound as of heavy footsteps. Sivert's, beyond doubt. For he said in his letter that he was still *tramping* about with his friend Ferdinand.

Hedvig wrote but seldom. She was in Copenhagen now, in service with a family in high society. She

was always telling of how much she was *learning*—and how much more she wanted to learn.

As for love-making or such-like nonsense, never a word from Hedvig. And this was strange for a girl of her age. But then, who ever could understand Hedvig ? Even Fru van Haag confessed she could not. She and Hedvig's mother put their heads together often and talked long of their young friend, till it almost seemed as if she were there in the room with them. And after, when they saw how empty the room was in reality, the tears came into their eyes.

So passed a few more quiet years ; a time when all events seemed buried in winter sleep.

XIII

SINCE the time of his famous venture in courtship-by-proxy, Emanuel had been as his father's comrade and equal. But under the influence of the intellectual nourishment served out at his new school, the lad had grown to such an extent that he was soon, metaphorically speaking, thrusting his head through the low roof of the cottage into another world. He could still manage to accompany his father on a walk in the woods, or go sailing with him now and then, but found it impossible now to take part in his religious rites, a source of thrilling excitement to him in former days. His father's voice seemed now, as it were, to come from a distance; it had no longer that power of tickling his ear close to. It did not matter whether he spoke of his great inventions, past and to come, or his revelations—for revelations he had had—or of more ordinary, commonplace things, such as, for instance, the mysticism of numbers. Mysticism—yes, it was here the crux of the matter lay—all this mysticism became somewhat tiresome in the long run. The figures once learnt at school could be quite hard enough to deal with at times, even as they were. But once allow them to be complicated further—as, for instance, by reckoning 1 as the Messiah, 0 as Jehovah, 9 as the Third Person of the Trinity, and 6 for the Evil One himself—and, well, there would be little hope of passing official exams.

Emanuel preferred to come down occasionally to

his mother's level. True, she was mute in all foreign languages, but in her native tongue she could speak with remarkable wisdom of her flowers, and sun and wind, and fowls and singing birds and other creatures of the garden. She waged a bloodless war with the starlings, that sought to nip the shoots of her tomato plants. It was quite amusing, really, to see these small robbers making away in terror when their wings came in contact with Fru Egholm's carefully laid obstructions of black thread. It was really wonderful what she could make out of a single plant in a flower-pot. As, for instance, with that old philodendron that Egholm had accidentally burnt off close to the stem by putting a lamp underneath. Emanuel thought it was done with once and for all ; but his mother, recovering from her first grief, declared the case not hopeless yet. She cut the wounded part clean, strewed red brick-dust over it, and placed it in a better light. And now wonders began. There was a little grey speck on the stem, that had always been there. And from this issued forth a tiny shoot, gradually extending to a curved horn, rather like the spur of a cock. It was almost beyond belief how that spur developed. It took a terrible time, to be sure, but at last, at long last, the wondering observers could see beyond all doubt that it consisted of a single delicately rolled-up leaf. Then one morning it unfolded, and lo ! something larger and lovelier than had ever before been seen—breaking, moreover, into the curious tatters that are the special mark of the philodendron. Day after day mother and son had watched together, and marvelled over this conjuring trick of Nature in drawing a brand-new, beautiful leaf out of a withered stem. They did not talk much about it, but often their eyes met in intimate understanding when they marked

how the plant in the course of the night had given the horn a new unexpected turn.

There were one or two other points, too, on which mother and son understood each other. Egholm invariably kept his purse-strings jealously fastened, but Emanuel found his mother always ready and able to find some way of providing necessary clothes and books. She lived in dread lest her boy should appear behind the others at the school. It needed but a word, and her hand flew to her pocket, or to the old brass mortar, or one of the other hiding-places where her treasury was distributed. Now, while things were quiet and steady, Egholm's business brought in a decent little income—why not put some of the money to a good use? And learning—surely that was a good use enough? At times Fru Egholm even thought Emanuel too modest in his demands, and went out herself, without saying anything to him, to buy a book or so, which she placed on his shelves with a triumphant smile. They were always books about natural history, in which he was especially interested.

The practical matters of the home, however, interested him far less now than when he was younger. He had to think about himself now. In a little while he would have passed his first exam—and what then? Fru van Haag could give him no advice, for all her wisdom in other things. All she said was, "Well, what would you *like* to do?" And that was just the difficulty. What he would like to do—to be honest, Emanuel's liking ran chiefly in the direction of listening to the chatter of starlings, or watching the conjuring tricks of a philodendron. And one could hardly make a living out of that!

Altogether it was a difficult matter enough.

Then it came about that Emanuel, all unexpectedly, stumbled into the midst of an event which, more than any previous happening, wrought revolution in the Egholms' life.

It was one day in March. He was walking home from school, feeling fine and grown up, and with an air as of an eminent lawyer at least. Ho, he thought to himself—didn't use to walk along like this in the old days! No, it was hopping up and down over ditches and planks then. But that was ages ago—thank goodness!

He had only a couple of subjects left now. And to-day he had done better than he had ever hoped in arithmetic. But he was feeling tired and hungry. He strode rapidly over the plank bridge and in through the garden, grasped at the door—what was this? It was locked!

Funny thing! Well, well . . . Emanuel went round to the kitchen door. Well, of all the . . . This was locked too—unflinchingly, unalterably locked! Such a thing had never happened before. In broad daylight—and a weekday!

He walked to the window, and, flattening his nose against one of the small panes, saw his mother and father grovelling on the floor, each with a bundle of paper money in one hand. Emanuel stared in utter dismay.

What on earth could have happened? Where had they got all that money from? Why had they locked the doors and never heard him when he came?

His thoughts flew hither and thither, with nothing to hold by, nothing to start from, flurrying round and making all more tangled still.

Father and mother . . . had they murdered some-

body and stolen a fortune ? Was there perhaps a still-warm corpse hidden under the settee ? Ah, it would cost them a good round sum now to make him, Emanuel, hold his peace !

At last they heard him. His mother handed her bunch of notes to her husband, and sprang up. A moment later came her voice at the door :

" Emanuel ! Come along—quick, this way ! "

She locked the door again. Emanuel did not fail to mark that her face was hot, and her hair straggling wildly about her forehead.

" Stay where you are ! " cried his father. " No, come along in. But carefully—carefully, I say."

Emanuel took hold of the door-handle limply, but loosed his hold again and let his mother go in front. It was only with an effort he could move a step himself.

And the sight before him now is hardly calculated to restrain his riotous imagination.

There, in the middle of the room, his father, prostrate on the floor, his face of a yellowish pallor, his forehead extending back in an idiotic curve right to his neck, his features at once limp and excited. He waves to them, threatening, without a word, to stand still, and indicates helplessly the state of the floor.

From the settee across to the piano and under it, a carpet of notes, set out in row upon row, with a finger's breadth between. The room is paved with brown tiles, each of them a ten-*Kroner* note. It is these to which Egholm is pointing, with a face of misery, without a word, as a cripple drawing aside the trappings from his maimed legs.

Emanuel gripped the handle of the door to steady himself ; he felt giddy, as in the old days when Hedvig had been swinging him round at arm's length.

" Where—where did you get it all ? " he asks confusedly.

His father answers only with a shake of the head. He has still a thick bundle of notes in his hands ; he picks out one, pinches and waves it twenty times to make sure there are not two together, lays it down reluctantly in its place in the row, and takes the next. His forehead is now smooth, now wrinkled in perplexed anxiety, wondering whether this unheard-of game of patience will work out.

Fru Egholm follows his movements with her eyes, and makes answer nervously to Emanuel's question :

" Where ? Why, they came by the post. From the Minister himself—or from the railway, I suppose it was. Oh, and—good heavens, poor child, I've forgotten all about your dinner ! But there's the envelope, so you can see for yourself. How'd you get on in arithmetic to-day, dear ? "

At last came understanding—came almost with a stab of physical pain to his head.

Ah—aha ! The money for the house, of course. The sale of the property had been effected in the meantime quietly, and he had never heard a word. His work for the exam had kept him out of it all. His parents must have kept the whole thing a secret—they had never done that before. Anyhow, here it was, a fact accomplished. It seemed wonderful, somehow. He had been interested himself, long ago, in the question of the new railway station and its possibilities, but the constant talk this way and that had wearied him.

" Don't move a step, either of you," cried his father suddenly. " I've got it all mixed up. Why didn't you stay in here as I told you ? I make it twenty *Kroner* too much."

Emanuel came to himself again.

" That'll be mine, I expect," he said, with a laugh. " Some of my pocket-money I must have left lying about."

" There aren't too many, you may be sure," said his mother. " We counted them before, Egholm, when you laid them out first. Let me . . ."

" No, no, no ; I'll do it myself ! " And Egholm began glancing in little jerks from note to note, whispering silently all the time as he counted. But the result this time seemed worse than before. He looked up despairingly and said :

" There, you can see for yourselves ; fourteen rows and thirty-seven in each, that makes . . ."—he consulted a scrap of paper—" 5180. Now, keep that in your heads a minute. What was it ? Right. Then one five-hundred-*Kroner* note. Wait a minute—I must see if that's genuine. Well, that makes—what was it we said before ? "

" It makes 5680 altogether."

" No, it must be more. Well, perhaps you're right. Say 5680. And here behind me I've got a hundred and thirty-four in tens. That *is* twenty *Kroner* too much. Not a shadow of doubt. We must send them back at once."

" Oh, the railway's ever so rich," said Fru Egholm.

" Ah—I see what you mean—we ought to sacrifice them to God ! Not a bad idea ! "

" Hi—wait a minute," put in Emanuel. " Look here, there's one missing in this row and another here."

Sure enough, there was a gap in each of two rows, where the legs of the piano came between.

The notes were now arranged in hundreds. Emanuel and his mother sat on the floor watching reverently,

Egholm seemed to fancy that the slightest movement would create a hurricane and whirl away untold sums in a whiff, to be lost for ever. Not till the notes were securely bundled and tied up with string did he breathe a sigh of relief. Indeed, he brightened up altogether now.

" Here, feel the weight of them ! Ah yes, run and fetch the scales from the kitchen, and see how much they weigh. It's a nuisance with that one for five hundred, though—that'll make it less, of course."

" What fun to have the whole lot in one-*Øre* pieces," said Emanuel.

" Seven hundred thousand ! Yes. No, the proper way would be to have it all in golden ingots. Then all we'd have to do would be to bite off a chunk once a year. Still, notes are none so bad, after all. Only fancy, there were thirty tens numbered straight on. Think of it ! Thirty links in the chain of wealth that holds the world together—are mine ! "

They sat for a while chatting comfortably together. Emanuel ate his meal with rare enjoyment, while his mother went to and fro between parlour and kitchen. There, just in front of Egholm, on the edge of the piano, lay the bundle of notes tied up with string. All three laughed and found the most amusing things to say, always something to do with money. It was as if the house were stocked and stuffed to bursting with money —money in every possible form. Thus occupied, they failed to notice a timid little knocking at the door. And with the suddenness of a vision, the door opened and there stood Fru van Haag herself before them.

Egholm jerked the string, and the bundle of notes hopped down like a puppy beneath his chair.

" Egholm and his distinguished last-born both look-

ing as if turned to stone. Am I really such a fright as all that ? " said Fru van Haag.

" N—o, not at all," stammered Egholm. " Only, I thought the street door was locked."

" It was. And so I had to climb up on the garden seat and get through the window."

This set Egholm off laughing again—it was simply too delightful to think of : the finest, loveliest woman in all the world clambering in through a window to see him ! He would have said something properly amusing, but, finding it impossible to speak at all at the moment, he went round in front of the chair on which Fru van Haag had just sat down, and began winding up the string, sending the toy puppy-dog (value 7000 *Kr.*) hopping along over the floor. At last he hauled it in, hoisted it up, and after many antics and capers, lowered it into Fruen's lap.

Wondering queries followed, and were met with smart, swift reports like short hurrahs.

" And we're happy, then," said Fruen, when she grasped what had happened. She stood up, with tears in her eyes, and threw her silk-sleeved arms about his faded shoulders.

Fruen demanded that the bundle should be unfastened. Egholm complied ; he had not the slightest fear now of hurricanes, or any catastrophe whatever.

" Well," said Fru van Haag, turning over the notes, " it's money, right enough. Real money—heaps of money."

" You've seen more than that at a time. There used to be piles in your father's safe, rolls of money, as high as *that* from the floor ! "

Fruen shook her head. " Ah no, that wasn't the same thing. How long did it all last when the passage

dues were abolished? No; money should be where there's room for it—that is, where there wasn't any to speak of before."

"Precisely my own opinion," said Egholm, with a bow and a scrape. "But where are we to store this treasure for to-night?"

"Why, in the bank. Where else . . . ?"

But Egholm didn't believe in banks. He wanted to guard his treasure himself. And surely it wasn't pleasing to the Lord to have things stowed away *so* safely that he couldn't lay a finger on them if he wished.

"Bury it under the cherry tree," suggested Emanuel.

Fruen entered into the hidden treasure idea at once. It was so delightfully romantic.

"Suppose you took it to bed with you?"

"That's not a bad idea."

"Yes; hide them under your pillow."

"No, under the pillow won't do. That's the first place a thief would look. Much rather make a bed of notes, so I could hear them crackling every time I move, and wake up half suffocated to find the big blue five-hundred fellow shifted across my mouth."

Fru Egholm had slipped away to her own domains; she entered now with a strange but festive arrangement on a tray—chocolate in a cup, a plate of cakes, and at least five glasses of different sorts of *Syltetøj*.

"What's Little Mother been up to now? And I'm on strict diet," said Fruen, with a shake of the head. But she began at once fingering the glass of wild strawberries.

"Just for once," said Fru Egholm persuasively. "Seeing what a grand day it is for Egholm."

"And for you too, surely?"

" Ah no. If only I'd had my little garden to keep, the railway might have kept their money for me ! "

Fru van Haag set down her plate and spoon. Her cheeks paled, her eloquent brown eyes grew wide and anxious.

" Are they taking away your garden, Little Mother ? And here are we going on like this as if it were the luckiest thing in the world. Oh, that's too cruel ! We ought to be ashamed of ourselves. But they mustn't ; we won't let them ! "

" We can't very well get all this money and keep the house and garden as well," said Egholm, stalking nervously up and down.

" And just now, when the crocuses are coming out everywhere. And there's big green leaves on the honeysuckle by the window already ! Oh, how could we be so cruel to Little Mother ! "

" Not a bit of it ! " cried Egholm cheerfully, twirling his precious bundle by the string. " You haven't heard my last stroke of genius. Nearly as smart as the deal itself. I've sold the place, it's true, but we're not to move out of it, for all that. I've *rented* my house from the railway till the first of August ! "

" That's four months. But what about after ? "

Egholm repeated the word uncomprehendingly. " After ? " He was neither accustomed nor inclined to think ahead through all eternities at once.

Fru van Haag stroked Little Mother's hand. No, it was no good giving way like that now, after the thing was done. She had felt with Egholm in the matter, had surrendered to the excitement of the scheme, eager to see if he really would succeed in disappointing all the town and becoming a rich man. That it might cost something to get rich had never entered her head.

"But what are we to give Little Mother instead of her Garden of Eden?"

Fru Egholm stroked her cheek awkwardly and said:

"If you'd play to us a little . . ."

"This very minute!" cried Fruen, and ran to the piano. Her spring coat was coloured like the inside of a mussel shell.

She sat down and began to play; first a few runs, as if accustoming her fingers to the ground. Some of the notes were stiff. Then she played a few pieces, whatever came into her head. She named each as it came. Stephen Heller. A little thing of Haydn.

Egholm nodded. Haydn—yes, he knew *him*. What was there Egholm didn't know?

Chopin—"Berceuse."

Emanuel and his mother stood silently in the background. Egholm's musical sense was practically deaf-mute, but he liked this "Berceuse" thing. There—a funny little trill there. And there it was again! Would it come any more?

Fruen half turned in her seat. Wasn't there anything Little Mother would specially like?

"Eh, no—it was all just lovely, whatever Fruen played."

"Sure there's nothing, really?"

Nay, 'twas no good talking about it. . . . But there was a thing she remembered . . . a thing they played when the soldiers marched off to Lundby Bakker. She'd never forgotten it. And Fru Egholm began telling how she had stood by the roadside and seen it all. And when the wounded came back into Aalborg the same night, blood dripping from the cart on either side . . .

Fruen bent over the old piano as if whispering to

it. And the poor decrepit instrument called up something of past glories; its rusted strings and dented sounding-board gave out almost more than they possessed.

It was as if the walls fell away, the room, time itself . . .

Hark! Tramp, tramp—hear the crunch of heavy boots upon the road! Clang—clanking of metal. And see there—red faces with bluish-white eyes gazing straight ahead. A thousand haversacks slapping and swinging in time, a marching forest of arms. A roar from somewhere ahead; it runs like the rushing of a storm through the forest.

And now—fierce, fiery play.

The trumpets' quivering lightnings, furious hailstorms from the drums; the pitiful tinkle of the triangle, and the big drum thumping heavy blows below the belt.

"Ah, listen!" cried Fru Egholm, lifting one finger.

The rush of sound is nearer now. Gusts of wind fling it furiously up the green slopes, where they stand looking on. Then fainter—fainter—fainter—till nothing is left but the harsh crunch of footsteps tramping alone once more along the heavy road.

Emanuel's eyes were straining wide, even his father scratched thoughtfully at his wreath of hair. Fru Egholm wrung her hands and said, with emotion:

"Yes, it was that very one. Oh, it was good of you to remember it. I've never heard it since until to-day."

"It was you that sang it into my ear," said Fruen, with a gentle smile.

She rose, and began drawing on her gloves. Egholm offered to see her home.

"You—in those old rags," said Fru Egholm, horrified. "A nice thing, indeed!"

"I'll put on my decorations!"

" Decorations—huh ! "

" Ah, you just look ! " Egholm had hung the bundle of notes in a string round his neck.

" It's nothing less than scandalous to think of you walking along the street with Fruen like that ! Oh, what's that ? Let me look ! Dear, dear, how dreadful ! "

A big triangular rent had been torn in Fruen's glistening coat.

" Why, then, I'm in rags too, it seems," said Fruen cheerfully. " But do take those nails out of the window, Egholm, before I come again."

" But he mustn't go, really. . . ."

" Give Little Mother all the money, then she'll let you, I know."

Fru Egholm, like a wise general, saw her chance and seized it.

" Well, then—but on one condition. It's nothing much really, but . . ."

" You shall have whatever you wish, Little Mother. Aren't we ever so rich ? "

" Yes, yes," agreed Egholm, anticipating some hint of a new hat, or a flower-pot to add to the ninety-nine already there.

" Well, then," said Anna Egholm solemnly, " it's this : that you send Sivert his passage-money, so he can come home ! "

XIV

THERE has always been one lawyer, and only one, in Knarreby. His name is O. P. Jensen. And O. P. Jensen is a big, fat man—a whale, who swallows the town in the course of a year and throws it up again after having extracted from it the six to eight thousand *Kroner* which he requires for the means of life. O. P. Jensen is hated by none, and liked by two or three. But now there appears on the scene a scion of lawyerhood by name Cornelius Worm, son of the brewer of that ilk.

What does Knarreby want with him? Away with him—he spoils the view!

Every one remembers yet his mischievous tricks as a boy.

His ugliness is rather of an inward sort. Outwardly he is none so bad. A mixture of good and ill. Rather a military type: tall and sunburnt, with a scar on his right cheek. It might have been gained in some fierce duel. But no—his vacant look denies it. Looking at his eyes, it seems more likely that the scar was left by the lash of a riding-whip.

Cornelius has no paunch; he does not go in for heavy meals at convenient intervals. Cornelius is a weasel, fasting for an unconscionable time, and then making up for it by sucking the blood of his neighbours' fowls in a single night.

Egholm sits on a chair in Cornelius Worm's office.

The young lawyer stands in front of him, with legs wide apart, talking to him like a father.

"Put your money where it's safe," he says, and strikes the desk with his fist.

"I don't believe in these banks and things," says Egholm modestly, "but you can be sure I'll put it somewhere where it'll be safe. If I could open my own skull, now, I'd put it in there at once."

"I wasn't thinking of banks at all. No, the proper thing to do with it is to invest it in some good property or sound securities."

"And where do you find them?"

Cornelius had, as has been said, a vacant glance, but he managed at times to imitate an expression. He could put on an air of authority and power by expanding his pupils.

"There you are! *You* don't know. Consequently, what you have to do is to engage a man of business who does!"

"And who'd that be?"

"Me!" says the lawyer, and as he utters the word he screws out his iris to unheard-of limits.

The idea of Worm as a confidential man of business seemed to Egholm at first ridiculous. Worm—the boy who had played abominable tricks with his turbine boat, and afterwards had the unprecedented effrontery to paint his name on the side!

Still, sitting here with a bundle of notes that filled out his chest—pigeon-breasted with wealth—he felt he could afford a trifle of foolishness. And he answered smartly:

"I'd been thinking of that very thing myself."

"And very sensible of you, I'm sure," said Worm, with a short laugh.

He turned to the big cupboard, painted to represent oak, and began drawing out mysterious bundles of documents, turned over pages, whistling the while, as if he had forgotten Egholm completely. Here and there he threw out a little remark: "Hotel property—thirty per cent. No, hardly good enough. Third mortgage—small villa, safe as the Bank of Heaven, but too low. Ah, here's something—gold-mine shares, round about fifty per cent. What do you say to something in that line?"

"What mine is it?"

"King Albert."

"Where?"

"Eh? Oh, how the devil should I know? Here it is: in Delavahana."

"And where's that?"

Cornelius Worm was smart at many things, but geography was not his strong point. There was an empty pause. Then Egholm said resignedly:

"Well—er—no. I shouldn't mind having a small share in a gold-mine. I don't mind telling you it was a fancy of mine years ago—gold-mining. But I can't say I care about King Alberts in Delavahana. Whether it's California, Africa, or Australia—I'm hardly likely to be going there now. I'm not as young as I used to be. I want something where I can live close by, and take a turn at the mining myself. Go out and grub about in the sand with both hands and fish out lumps of gold. I'm too old for the other thing. No—if you could pick up a bit of a gold-mine within eight or ten miles of here, say . . ."

"I've *got* it! The very thing!"

"The devil! You don't say so."

"Ah, you may not believe me, but I have."

" Where—where is it ? "

" Here ! " The lawyer waved a document, that seemed mysteriously attractive, before Egholm's face.

" But what is the place ? What do you call it ? "

Worm sat down suddenly in his chair, and said, with the pleasant superiority of a man of the world :

" My dear Egholm, I am sure you have heard, now, of the Aaby Brickworks ? "

Egholm had certainly heard the name before. This seemed to him sufficient grounds for nodding emphatically here.

" Well and good," said Worm, with a satisfied smile, followed by an expansion of his pupils. " You know it. It may have been, perhaps, a *trifle* hasty on my part to say I *had* this gold-mine, but, if you like to leave the matter in my hands, why, I don't mind saying there's little short of the Devil himself could hinder me from getting it. Come up again to-morrow and I'll let you know."

Whereupon he ushered Egholm out of the office—all but thrust him out—without heeding his objections.

Worm, this son of a brewer of small beer, a lawyer whose knowledge of the law was watered down to near the limit of dilution, was brewing here a crafty potion that went to Egholm's head in a very little time.

Briefly, the course of Egholm's intoxication was as follows : He crushed his wife's protests and warnings fiercely out of being. He grew poetical, and said, " What, you say it's not a gold-mine ? I say it is ! Clay, yellow clay, shall turn to gold under my hand. Haven't I always wished to be a landed proprietor, a lord of the soil ? I shall be now, in the most literal sense. Here's the clay that God has given us, a good

thing in its way, but needing treatment. I'll give it the treatment, I'll perfect it, glorify it. Didn't I once invent something specially to do with bricks ? "

" But, Egholm, do, please, find out a little about it first ! "

" That's just what I am doing. I've engaged a man of business already, for that very purpose ! "

A week after, Egholm went up to Worm's office and signed the note which made him owner of Aaby Brickworks.

He got it for 5000 *Kroner* in cash — a ridiculous bargain really ; the total price was only 14,000. He paid down the money, handing out first, of course, the single 500-*Kroner* note, but finding, nevertheless, that his chest-protector dwindled abominably. It had warmed and weighed on him so pleasantly, hanging there on its string like a huge amulet, an aid to all that was desirable, a charm against all ills. Possibly it was this feeling which led him to pack an old Prayer Book in among the remaining notes, thus not only maintaining the previous bulk, but even increasing the weight—and, of course, the value. It was really this precious work which gained for Egholm the respect of his fellow-townsmen. Every one knew, of course, exactly what he had got from the railway for his house, and with equal precision the amount he had paid for the Aaby Brickworks. Whereafter any child could reckon out what remained to himself. But when Egholm, the day after, chanced to pass by Bro's general store, he recollected that he wanted a few nails for his boat.

The nails cost 10 *Øre*. Egholm opened his purse —there was not a single *Øre* in it. Bro himself looked miserable, nay, on the verge of tears, at sight of that lamentable void. But Egholm, turning a little aside,

drew a packet from under his vest and unfastened it, and tendered Bro a 10-*Kroner* note, with apologies for having nothing smaller at the moment. And while Bro was getting the change, Egholm half furtively laid his packet of notes on the scales, which promptly indicated something over 1½ lb.

Thus it leaked out about the town that Egholm was still so incontinently rich that he must count his money by *weight*, albeit it was in paper. Rumour asserted that he had won the biggest prize in the State lottery. And the town bowed down before him. All on account of that book of devotion.

The town bowed down likewise before Sivert, who came back home as fast as the steamer could bring him. Outwardly, no doubt, he was strikingly like the Sivert whom all had despised—but there was no getting away from the fact that he was now the son of a wealthy man, and heir to Aaby Brickworks.

Furthermore, he had come back with money of his own. Some rattling loose in his trousers pocket, and a nice little bundle of genuine dollar notes. This was the passage-money his father had sent him from home, and which Sivert had saved by working his passage across as cook's mate.

Oh, Sivert was no fool. He did not, like so many returned emigrants, affect a fur coat with the fur outside ; no, but he had what was better, an inside fur—a fur about his inner being. Formerly, Sivert's inner being had been naked, exposed to the scorn and derision of all. Now, it was otherwise. And to cap all, Sivert could speak English to the extent of saying " No " and " Yes " in the proper places.

His father was not a little impressed by these evidences of culture acquired in foreign parts. He was

constantly asking about things which he supposed—conceding it beforehand—were " different over there, of course." Sivert would nod portentously, wrap himself well up in his inner fur, and bring out his Yes and No, to the satisfaction of all concerned.

When alone with his mother, Sivert would creep out of his fur and be her own dear boy as of old. They had a little talk together in the kitchen on the evening of the day he came home.

" And you won't be going away and leaving us again, now, will you ? I'm sure it seems a blessing and a miracle to have you back this time."

" I must," said Sivert, shaking his head. " I can't stay here. It's too small altogether; everything's the same here."

" Too small—why, surely, dear—you coming back like you are now, I shouldn't call that a little thing to begin with. And then your father's a rich man now, you know, with his Brickworks and all. No, it seems to me if you were to get married now, while it's time—I'm sure you could have one of the prettiest in the town."

" But if there's none of them that's the sort I care about ? "

" Oh, well, of course . . . But what is the sort you care about ? "

" Well, first of all, with gold-filled teeth. They all have that in America, and you've no idea how desperately fine it looks. Then I want some one that's simply wasting away with love and longing for me. Thrown herself at my feet at first sight, without me begging or forcing her any way myself."

" Why, as far as that goes, I'm sure there's many'd say ' No ' and ' Yes ' in English and thank you into

the bargain as soon as you cared to ask them. But as for gold-filled teeth, my dear, 'tis vanity, and an abomination unto the Lord."

"Oh, it's only here in the old country He doesn't like it. It's a pretty custom, really. But suppose I made up to Him by leaving out the gold-that-glitters part, who've you got to offer, now?"

Sivert's mother was glad to find the boy willing at any rate to discuss the question. She was kneading the dough for a Christmas cake. Taking the bag of raisins, she set it in front of him. "Help yourself to some raisins, dear. Ah, you see it'll come all right if you'll only be good and stay at home with us. What do you say, now, to the watchmaker's girl, Mille? Yes, take some more, do."

"Give me a bit of dough to wrap them up in. You know I always was fond of raw dough. It's nearly three years now since I tasted it. And it was partly for that I came home. Mille—h'm! A watchmaker doesn't sound very fine, really."

"Well, there's no such hurry that you need say yes or no this very night. And there's those three girls of the vet.'s; they've been going around ready and waiting ever so long, and none of them engaged yet."

"They're hardly what you might call sizeable enough. I want a fine tall girl, one that looks as if she might be sweethearts with a dentist."

"Well, what about Grocer Salomon's Elfrida?"

"A red-faced thing! No, I like 'em rather pale, for my part."

"Well, there's Fanny Due, the shoemaker's girl."

"Shoemaker! As well say cobbler and have done with it!"

"They're quite looked up to in the place; and

Fanny's just come out of hospital—I'm sure she's pale enough."

"Good! We'll keep her over and have a look at her later on."

"No, let's see if we can't get it settled now. Take another bit of dough before it goes in the oven."

"No more now, thanks—it's rather heavy on the stomach if you take a lot. And besides, I'm not sure I ought not to feel insulted when you stand there offering me all these wetched womenfolk just to make me forget my own true love that ever was, my sweetheart of old, Minna Lund!"

"Oh, there now, if I hadn't forgot. . . ."

"Ah, but I didn't forget! I remembered her at the right moment, I did. Is she still running loose?"

"Yes, yes . . . But there's been great changes there, since the old days. Her father died last month, and she's started a millinery business in the shop. Getting on very nicely too, so folk say. And then, besides, she's got her pupils, you know. Singing lessons."

"Good, good!" nodded Sivert. "Me and a milliner—me and a milliner with musical talents. Why, I sing myself. Think she's forgotten me?"

"No, indeed, I'm sure."

"There, and I'd hoped and made sure she would. It was she that got them to keep me out of the Club. But if she'd forgotten me, now . . ."

"Well, there, I dare say she has. After all, she's not a child now. And you know how unkind people are—they say she's simply mad on getting a sweetheart. And they say she always recommends customers to take the ugliest hat she's got, so they shan't cut her out. She's getting on for thirty now, you know."

"Good! Excellent!" said Sivert, with satisfaction.

"But if you want her, take my advice and make haste about it, while father's still got a bit of money left. She's running about just now after this engineer man that's here about the railway. Not for his looks, I'm sure, nor his virtue, but because he's got a yellow overcoat with a strap at the back and a telescope thing on three legs."

"I'll cut him out and every way surpass him," said Sivert, with a lordly wave of the hand.

"Don't you think you ought to try and join the Club, then?"

Sivert found this suggestion excellent. He took Emanuel along with him as a sort of guide and interpreter. Bookseller Dahlberg entered his name without the slightest objection or any mention of conditions. Sivert stood crackling some notes in his hand.

"It's four *Kroner* a year," said Dahlberg.

"Then I'd like to pay for three years in advance," said Sivert harshly.

"For *three years*?" Bookseller Dahlberg had a tuft of beard on his under lip that quivered at them when he spoke.

"Yes," said Sivert stubbornly, in English.

That summer Sivert was all but an autocrat in the home, his father being away most of the time at the brickworks. The idea was to begin operations at the earliest possible date, but it was soon found that there were various difficulties in connection with plant and material, which led to considerable wastage both of money and time. The boiler was choked with fur, and the driving-band of the engine was gone; other machinery exhibited like defects. There could be no possibility now of starting work before the coming spring. Heaven be praised, that there was such a thing as credit!—

Egholm had quite considerable credit in the place for the time being. And then the price of coal—simply horrifying! Also, he would need to have a certain sum in hand for wages for the spring.

Oh, it was not all delightful to be a great man! But what did he care for the worry and toil of it all as long as Fru van Haag was pleased with him?—Fruen with the great brown eyes.

It was a pleasure, indeed, to overcome difficulties. There was the question of a foreman, for instance—he had had considerable trouble in finding one. But Cornelius Worm took up the matter, and procured a man who was willing—nay, it seemed, more than willing—to accept the post, and seemed to know quite a lot about it.

One decent burning would set the whole thing right, declared the man. And he, for his part, would be glad to take the faulty bricks which might be found in part payment of wages. There were always a few faulty ones, unfortunately. That sort of thing couldn't be helped.

Egholm found this quite a good idea, and a contract was drawn up to that effect in the office of Cornelius Worm.

Emanuel and his father went out to the brickworks together; the place looked very desolate and unpromising, thought Emanuel. The winter storms had torn a number of tiles from the roof of the kiln-house, the rafters showing like naked ribs beneath. But this and other dilapidations were, after all, but trifles. At last they came to the pits. Egholm smiled and nodded to his son, and said:

"There! You won't deny *that's* something of a sight! Only think—all that expanse of earth. . . ."

" What about the quality of the clay ? " said Emanuel, crumbling a piece in his fingers.

His father started slightly. " You bothering about that, too ? " he said. " Well, to tell the truth, it struck me at first it was pretty poor stuff, but we don't really know—thank goodness for that !—we don't really know what's good and what's bad. But we can *see* there's plenty of it ! Lord preserve us ! Why, there can hardly be a bigger deposit anywhere in the country."

And this was not all exaggeration. The half-faded tracks showed where the lines of metals or the transport of the stuff had been shifted again and again, towards the east, almost up to the boundary of the neighbouring ground.

Emanuel stood thoughtful for a while. Then, with a half-smile, he said :

" What is it that gets bigger the more you take out of it ? "

" Eh ? What do you mean ? Oh—that's an old one. A hole, of course."

" Exactly. A hole," said Emanuel, waving one finger to indicate the irregular contour of the pits.

" You mean—they've got a lot out of it already ? Well, yes, I dare say. But there's plenty left for us, you can be sure," said Egholm. And they went on to talk about the work, and the various things to be done before commencing again in the spring. But there was a touch of distraction in Egholm's manner at times, as if he were thinking of something to himself.

Emanuel was not as a rule occupied to any great extent with matters outside his own personal affairs. Fru van Haag—who ruled, it seemed, over most of the world—had got him a situation in a bank in a neighbouring town. That was enough to think about in itself.

He would be going there to start work in a few days' time. And he was looking forward to it. It was pleasant enough, no doubt, on the swings and roundabouts, but wearying in the long run.

" Aren't you going away yourself soon ? " he asked Sivert. But Sivert shook his head emphatically. *He* did not find life dull at home.

When " The Club " had a picnic in the woods, he was first among the dancers—and last. He put on his "inner fur" when he went out, and his English " Yes " and " No " proved an attraction to many. Sveidal, the engineer, might be seen sitting with him in one of the tents over a glass of beer. Sivert talked, and his companions listened—Hr. Sveidal thought of going to America himself some day.

" No," said Sivert, in answer to Emanuel's question. " Go away again ? What for ? I'm only just beginning to be looked up to here. It's not like it was in the old days, when I was a lousy glazier's boy. You couldn't expect a princess to look at anything so base and ordinary. No, Minna Lund's my last aim and goal, and I've got to win her this year, before it's too late."

Emanuel was silent. Sivert was highly amusing, no doubt, but more to himself than anything else. Hedvig was altogether different. Emanuel sought her counsel when anything troubled him, and she gave immediate answers, sharp and clear, wise and kindly enough, but always with a certain impatient harshness towards what she called *humbug*, without defining precisely what was referred to.

Emanuel made a last round of inspection, visiting his plants and birds' nests—it was not these things he was anxious to leave. He felt a trifle saddened at the thought that he would not be able to go to the garden-

party at Etatsraaden's. Up till now he had been every year, as far back as he could remember. That is to say, looking on from outside the hedge. But that, too, was something.

On the 24th of July he left to take up his new post.

XV

ENGINEER SVEIDAL, after prancing about in Knarreby for some years on his long legs, effecting a sort of espionage, becomes this year a respected resident of the place ; he is having a house built at the back of Egholm's garden—a small house, built of planks and roofed with tarred felt. Ordinarily, it might be termed a shed, but there can be no question of calling it so in this case, since a real live engineer sits there all day, directing the movements of his workmen like a general ordering his soldiers about. They are getting the ground levelled now. Little white and red marking-flags are stuck in here and there, and Hr. Sveidal moves zealously about doing things with a measuring tape and the interesting telescope thing on three legs.

The town looks on, well pleased with it all. There had been so much strife and dissension anent the site of the new railway station that it came as a relief to have the matter decided, once and for all, by a superior power. Hr. Sveidal had the entry of practically all the better-class houses. He had not much to say for himself, but his yellow coat with the strap at the back was a welcome and refreshing innovation. Moreover, he sang, and that not a little. He had begun taking lessons with Minna Lund after closing-time.

To tell the truth, his visits were not restricted to after closing-time. Ladies going in to try on a new hat might catch a glimpse of a yellow sleeve pushing to the

door of the back parlour every time Minna Lund ran out or in. Minna herself never could remember to shut doors behind her—it was an old habit of hers from her schooldays.

Already the town was beginning to talk about an engagement between the two. Why should not fate be kind at last to Minna Lund ? Three times for luck, and the fourth time does it. Neither the schoolmaster nor the wine merchant nor Cornelius Worm had proved constant—what more natural, then, that it should turn out to be this half-foreign person at last ?

Who could forget that Engineer Sveidal had sent a wreath of everlasting beech leaves to Draper Lund's funeral ?

Minna herself was of the same way of thinking. Why not, she said to herself, and blushed at the thought. And from this time forward she began to advise all young ladies in exact contradiction to her true opinion on the matter of hats.

" All's fair in love," she told herself. The others had mothers and fathers to help them on, but what had she ?

The business did not appear to suffer in the least on that account. On the contrary, Minna seemed to be making more than before. She ran through the books and pounced on the balance with a hawk-like readiness inherited from her father. Then she went to the glass, turned her head first to the left then to the right, smoothed out a single wrinkle, threw a silk shawl tentatively over her shoulders, and wrote a note to Hr. Sveidal asking him to dinner on Sunday.

Hr. Sveidal accepted, and the dinner was prepared accordingly. There were no other guests, but the food was good and the wine plentiful.

" Such extravagance ! " said the engineer, as they sat over their coffee.

" Here, you mean ? Oh, well, I suppose I could manage with less. I could live downstairs, you know, and let out the rooms up here. The dentist would have liked to take them."

" Well, there's more room than you want for yourself, I should think. Why didn't you let them to the dentist ? "

" No ; he wouldn't for less than five years."

" Well, surely that's all to your advantage ? "

" I want," said Minna, drawing herself up in her chair, " to have a place where I could offer my husband —that is to say, I mean, if ever I were to marry—offer him a home ! "

Minna stammered a trifle, perhaps, but there was a certain energy in her voice. She flung her cigarette-end with a slap against the stove, though there was an ash-tray within easy reach.

The engineer sat deep down in a low chair, his knees sticking up to such an extent as to present a slight resemblance to his own three-legged telescope.

" And the business can stand it all right," added Minna. " I make more out of my hats than father did out of all his hundred odd things. And the premises here will rise in value, too, as the town develops. What do you think yourself, Hr. Sveidal ? Do you think I'm living beyond my means ? "

" I know I am," said the engineer. He seemed pondering deeply over something or other. " At least, I'm paying more than I ought. Two-and-a-half *Kroner* a day for a single room at the hotel—it's too much, really, you know."

" Yes, indeed," said Minna warmly.

" I could get a whole suite of rooms for that."

" Yes. . . ."

" And here are all these rooms of yours never used except a few hours of the day. It seems a waste. . . ."

" It *is* a waste," Minna agreed. " Oh, give me a light, do you mind ? Thanks so much."

" And, really, I've got an idea. I want to ask your advice. I can't advise you, you know, but you might help me. . . ."

Hr. Sveidal took out his pocket lighter ; Minna had been a trifle too violent with his cigarette.

" And that is . . ." said Minna expectantly.

Hr. Sveidal turned towards her, with a gleam in his eyes.

" Suppose, now, I was thinking—if I were to set up a camp-bed in the drawing-office now, just for the summer, do you think—well—think people would laugh at the idea ? "

" Really, I've no idea," said Minna coldly. And she rose suddenly from her seat with such violence that her liqueur glass fell from the table and rolled along the carpet.

" Allow me ! " The engineer bent down to pick it up. " It's all right—not broken."

But Minna laughed, a shrill, harsh laugh, and crushed the glass under her heel. Then she went over to the piano. Hr. Sveidal rose and shambled after her.

" Of course, since you laugh at the idea yourself," he said, " I understand. But do me a favour—don't say a word about it to anyone in the town. I never thought of doing it, really, you know. It was just an idea of mine. . . ."

Minna sang, and later allowed Hr. Sveidal to take his turn. She wrestled with him, forced him to open his

mouth to its widest, and abused him roundly. But when he had finished, she recovered her good humour, and sat down to sing herself once more.

"Awfully pretty, that one," said Hr. Sveidal.

"Do you think so? Yes, it's quite a touching little thing, really," said Minna, leaning back and looking up at him.

"Touching, yes, that's just the word. How does it begin now: something about a hall . . . 'in hall the rest are sleeping . . .'"

Minna laughed again harshly as before.

"Hall? Whatever are you talking about? '*When all* the rest are sleeping—my heart goes out to you.' And you didn't even understand a word of it. Oh, how like a man!"

Sveidal apologised. He liked the song awfully, he said, and wrote out the words in his notebook from Minna's dictation. She promised to teach him it some day.

They sat chatting pleasantly for a little while; then Hr. Sveidal regretted he must be going.

"Going?" said Minna in astonishment. "Why, it's only nine o'clock. We've hardly had our meal."

Unfortunately, the engineer had a most important letter to write—simply couldn't put it off. And he frowned as one burdened with weighty duties.

"But you can write it here."

No, sorry, but he couldn't. As a matter of fact, it wasn't the letter so much, but the stamp. Now, where could he get a stamp on a Sunday evening? He would have to go round and try to borrow one somewhere.

"I've got stamps," said Minna, with a smile. "Downstairs in the shop. I'll get you one. . . ."

" Oh, thanks ever so—but there's no hurry. It can wait till I go."

" All right, as you like. I always buy them by the sheet, you know. Father always used to. Just as well to get the reduction while you're about it."

" Fine man, your father," said Sveidal, glancing up involuntarily to the picture of Lund above the door. " What is that uniform he's taken in, by the way ? "

" Oh, that's when he got the championship in the shooting-club. Yes, I dare say he was clever in some ways, but he was always mixing himself up in things he'd better have left alone. That shooting-club, now. It cost him a couple of hundred *Kroner*, that championship, and d'you think it ever did the business any good ? Not the price of a sour herring ! "

" What did your father die of, if it's not rude to ask ? "

" He died of just that same silly habit—taking up all sorts of things that didn't concern him. Thought it was business—but it wasn't. He was mad on this tourist project, you know. Making Knarreby a show place, and brightening up trade. But there never came a single tourist after all, and he'd laid in a huge stock of bathing-dresses and towels and things. Then one day he went off himself with a great big red-striped bath-towel over his shoulder to have a bathe—the first time he'd ever done such a thing in his life. Thought he'd set the fashion, you understand, and *make* the place a seaside resort. Next day he was down with inflammation of the lungs, and that finished him. That wreath of yours was simply lovely, Hr. Sveidal. Everybody said so. And it kept such a long time, too."

Sveidal stroked his chin and said it was really nothing, nothing at all. But Minna hauled forth the locket on her watch-chain and showed him two red

beech leaves inside. "Yes . . ." she said, with great expression. After that she got the engineer out into the kitchen to boil some water for claret punch; she had sent the maid home directly after dinner. Minna herself looked neat and attractive enough among the kitchen things—with the result that Hr. Sveidal kissed her once or twice before the water boiled.

They took their cordial at a little table in front of the big sofa, sitting quite close together. But there was no more kissing. The engineer seemed if possible even more silent than before, and even lankier; his knees stuck up like sharp, unscaleable peaks in front of him. Minna tried going out into the kitchen again for some more sugar, and got him to go with her, but even that failed of its effect. Not till she led the conversation once more round to his work did he grow a trifle brighter. He was expecting a new machine one of these days, a concrete mixer. Possibly two, he explained, and his voice grew hoarser as he spoke. Yes, he was in charge of the whole thing—nobody over him, no. In a few days' time he would have all Egholm's poplars cut down, and the whole of the garden carted away. For the Egholms had only rented *the house*, and that only till such time as he, Sveidal, demanded its evacuation and demolishment.

Minna nodded admiringly.

Though, of course, Egholm was a decent sort; Hr. Sveidal would not think of troubling him out of any ill-will. The house might be left as it was for six months or so yet—and for the matter of that, the trees and garden too. He, Sveidal, would see what could be done about it.

Minna nodded even more admiringly.

Engineer Sveidal was touched by all this admira-

tion. He went on to say that a man like Egholm was a man one ought to help as far as possible—instead of taking advantage of him, as Cornelius Worm the lawyer had done.

" What's Cornelius Worm done ? "

" Didn't you know ? Why, he's got him to buy a brickworks that's nothing left of it but a gravel pit ! "

" Just the sort of thing that fellow would do," said Minna, with clenched teeth. " He always was a scoundrel."

" Yes—and he goes about boasting of it down at the hotel."

" *You'd* never do a thing like that, *I* know," said Minna, touching his glass lightly with her own.

It was getting late now, and Hr. Sveidal took his leave, with many thanks for a pleasant evening. Minna insisted on showing him down the stairs, and the stairway being dark, she put one arm round his neck to save herself from falling.

It was a fine, calm summer night outside.

" Isn't that some one standing by the fence over there ? " said Sveidal.

" No—it's only the shadow."

But the shadow moved as she spoke, and stole quietly away. The light from the window above fell across its path, and Minna exclaimed :

" Oh—yes, it is. It's Sivert Egholm. He's always hanging about here, day and night."

" Egholm's son—the one that's been to America ? "

" Yes. I'm sure I don't know what he's thinking of."

" Ah ! You're not particularly taken with him yourself, then ? "

" I ? Good heavens, no. What an idea ! "

" Well, I don't know. He seems quite a decent sort. I see him almost every day—I've talked to him a good deal. He's seen no end of things over there, you know. And he's fond of music, too—singing. I fancy he said something about taking lessons with you, Frøken Lund."

" With me ? Not if I know it. No, if I'm to have gentlemen pupils, they must be fine upstanding men that look a bit smart—not a little idiot like that."

Perhaps by way of showing what she expected of her fine upstanding pupils, Minna threw her other arm round Hr. Sveidal's neck, and drew his head down towards her.

" Thanks, delightful evening," he gasped, a little out of breath. " But—about that stamp. If it's not troubling you. . . . Only one—ten *Øre*. And an envelope, if you have one."

" A big one, do you want ? " asked Minna, going into the shop.

" It's all the same, as long as it's an envelope. I've paper myself."

" Does it matter if my name's on it ? "

" Oh . . . No, I'm afraid that won't do. No. But it doesn't matter, really."

" Here's one."

" Thanks, thanks ever so much."

" Sveidal, would you like to do me a favour in return ? Will you ? Take me with you to the garden-party at Etatsraaden's next month ? "

" I'd be delighted. But they haven't asked me, I'm sorry to say."

" Thanks, thanks, Sveidal—then that's a bargain. For they're *going* to ask you—I happen to know. And

they always send out the invitations with ' and lady.' Oh, won't it be lovely ! "

With this they parted. The engineer went shambling off at his lanky stride down the street. He did not go straight back to the hotel, but turned in through Stationsvej. He had to get that letter off by the night train.

A little way along he came up with Sivert, and the two joined company.

" I'd got such a beastly goddam toothache," said Sivert, " so I got up and went out."

" Weren't you standing down there a little while back outside Frk. Lund's ? "

" Did you see me ? " whispered Sivert.

" No, I didn't. But Frøken Lund said it was you."

" Oh, well, must be somewhere, you know. And I thought perhaps a little pretty song might ease the pain. And so Minna saw me ? More than I'd dared to hope. She didn't say anything about me, I suppose ? "

" No, not a word."

" No, of course not—she's very good that way."

" Well, I said you were fond of music, and then she said she'd like to have you for a pupil."

Sivert all but collapsed under the weight of this astonishing announcement. Then a moment later he leaped up in the air, waved both arms wildly, and said, with a hoarse laugh :

" Heavens above ! All the world shall hear my voice ! And she's going to give me lessons herself ! You're sure it's singing-lessons she meant ? Not lessons in millinery, for instance ? No, no, of course. . . ."

Sivert rattled on unceasingly ; now and again the engineer broke in with a short laugh. He found it all very amusing, but he was altogether incapable of judging

character. Lawyer Worm was a swindler, for he had said so himself. But, otherwise, everybody was nice and kind and all alike.

" I'm going up to the station," said Sveidal.

" I'll go with you. Couldn't think of going to bed again after this. Do you know, I've been standing there four solid hours by her fence to-night, in the hopes of hearing her delicious wailing ? Yes, I'll go and have a lesson this very night."

Sveidal took out his notebook, tore out two pages, and put them in the envelope. Then he wrote the address in his childish hand: " Frk. Emmy Meyer, Falkoneralle 38, Copenhagen."

He went out on to the platform and put the letter in the box. And thus it came about that Minna Lund's song went fluttering farther abroad than she had thought.

XVI

THE 17th of August comes round—the great day for Knarreby, the day of Etatsraaden's garden-party. It looks, moreover, as if it will be a bigger affair this year than ever before. There are rumours as to the purchase of enormous quantities of paper lanterns, of pastries on an unprecedented scale.

Emanuel came home by the midday train—he had got leave from the office specially to enjoy a treat that had been his since he was a child. He had some cuttings with him, for his mother, from the Bank Manager's drooping fuchsia—stolen cuttings they were, and could not possibly fail to grow. She was pleased and grateful for the gift, but said that he and Sivert would have to go alone to watch the fête in the evening, for their father was not at all in the mood for that sort of thing. He was always tearing out to the brickworks now, and coming back with wrinkles many and deep in his forehead. The bundle of notes had dwindled to the thickness of a thin slice of bread, and it was little consolation that the bills unpaid had in the same time mounted up to a pile beyond the span of any ordinary jaws.

"All the more reason for him to come; cheer him up," said Emanuel.

"Well, well, you'd better ask him yourself, dear."

Emanuel asked after his brother. Fru Egholm

reported evasively that Sivert seemed delighted beyond measure at something or other these days ; he had got himself new collars and a new black bowler hat—a trifle too big for him, she thought—and then to-day he had been out and had his photo taken. Not by father, no—who ever heard of such a thing ! He had actually gone to the new fellow, Eiermann, who had started a smart little business in the same line. And the night before he had been to an open-air dance out in Kongeskoven.

" Oh, he must be mad ! " said Emanuel.

" Ah, we mustn't forget he's used to bigger things over there," said his mother deprecatingly.

A thunderstorm was gathering over the town, with heavy showers, which drove first Sivert, then his father, home.

" Where've you been ? " asked Emanuel as Sivert came in.

" Out with Sveidal. We go about together all day now. I tell him all about my adventures, how I was husking corn in the West, and got hoisted up to the roof all naked, with a woman looking on. How I killed Nigger Jim, and how my own eyes have glittered over the Niagara Falls. I was beastly sick there, too. Come over there with me, and I'll show you the very spot—between two rocks. Then you can see the great big waterfall at the same time."

" Is that what you do all day, then ? "

" Ah, but I don't do it for nothing. Sveidal he invites me to Minna Lund's in return. She thinks me charming already, and wants me to teach her singing ! "

Egholm had been out at the brickworks. He livened up at once on hearing it was the day of the garden fête.

" We must go and have a look," he said. And standing in front of the glass, he began pulling grey hairs out of his beard.

" And they say," put in Fru Egholm, " there's to be fireworks or something wonderful extra this evening, because of being a jubilee of some sort."

At half-past seven the family set out, walking down over the fields by the beach. The rain had ceased; the whole of the western sky was red. A rich salt smell breathed out from the water and the banks of wet weed along the shore. Busy little waves were hurrying home to bed. Now and again Emanuel picked up a flat stone, weighed it critically in his hand, and sent it flying like a freed bird out over the water, touching the surface far out with tiny feet—once—twice—many times in succession.

" Ah," said Sivert, " you're a marvel without compare. A perfect Crœsus at all manner of stone-throwing tricks."

Emanuel went on with his ducks and drakes unheeding.

Sivert began again :

" You're a wonder, yes, but . . ."

Emanuel looked up; he had been waiting for something to follow, and it interested him more than the praise that went before it.

" But," said Sivert, with a dreamy laugh, " I've out-Crœsed you last night, my son."

" How do you mean ? "

" Last night I gained the victory over Minna Lund and her love—and to-day I've had my photo taken in a highly remarkable pose."

" Did you really dance with her last night ? "

"Did I not! Why, she had her arm round my collar nearly all the evening!"

"Oh, I don't want to hear any more of that stuff," said Emanuel, turning away to pick up a new stone.

Then said Sivert, with a sigh:

"Well, I don't mind telling you, it *was* my fixed intention to dance with her, and propose to her as well. But when she came prancing up with that engineer fellow, why, I changed my mind to something else—and something a great deal better!"

"Went home, I suppose?"

"Yes. But, first of all, I stood and regarded her critically with averted head for five minutes at least. And then I went—went, without heeding my ticket that I'd paid for and hardly used at all. And now I've furthermore sacrificed five *Kroner* on a dozen photographs of myself—all for her."

"But—you don't mean to say Eiermann takes five *Kroner* the dozen?"

"He wanted one *Krone* extra for sticking me up in the show-case outside. And there I'll be like a portent and a warning to remind her of me. Eiermann's show-case is just opposite her window."

Emanuel laughed, and went on throwing stones. Then he walked on sedately for a while, but, catching sight of a sea-urchin newly washed up among the weed, he picked it up, from force of boyish habit, and put it in his pocket.

"What do you want that for?"

Emanuel was embarrassed; he could hardly say himself what a bank clerk could possibly want with a sea-urchin. And, by way of excusing himself, he tried to make out that his find was something of exceptional rarity and value.

" And perhaps I'll present it to some museum. Look at the way these spines are arranged,now—all in a pattern. And its eyes are all here on the underside."

" Funny place to put them. Nasty, I call it."

" Ah, but it's just that that makes it a curiosity."

" Oh, all right. You can keep your curiosities for me. But that's just the sort of thing people like, I suppose. Something out of the ordinary. A yellow coat with a strap at the back, and a telescope thing on three legs. But when I'm stuck up in the show-case, photographed in a curiously mournful pose and woeful look, I'll get her to screw *her* eyes round the right way. *My* way. You wait and see."

The two elders, walking on ahead, stopped and beckoned. From where they stood, they could see right up the slope into Etatsraaden's garden. There were a few spectators gathered here already, but these were persons of no consideration whatever ; the better class began farther up, towards Stationsvejen, where one could look right across the lawn to the brilliantly lighted house.

Two men with folding ladders were moving down the garden paths, lighting the coloured lanterns.

The Egholms joined up in silence with the low ranks of people already assembled, resting their hands on the fencing and waiting patiently for something to happen. The dark was growing denser now ; out across the Belt, the red sky had changed to a deep dark blue.

" Look—just like a ship," said Fru Egholm.

" Where ? "

" The mansion there—I mean the house. Sailing towards us with all the lights. . . ."

Egholm could see it, yes. He stood there long, watching it sail, and enjoying the idea. When he closed

his eyes and opened them again, he could fancy it had come closer.

Now they would be sitting down to table, no doubt. Only the women and girls waiting on the guests could be seen now and again as they flitted past the windows, generally envied by those watching from without.

Ah, now they were singing! The watchers hummed the refrain: "And this is to greet . . ." with a feeling as if it made them in some way partakers in the feast. Suddenly there was a noise of chairs being pushed back and the guests returning thanks to host and hostess. At the same moment the verandah doors were thrown open, and cries of delight were heard at sight of the garden walks dotted all round with specks of fire in red and yellow, green and blue, as if some lucky spider had been spinning its glistening dew-pearled web over Etatsraaden's garden and all that was his.

The first couple swept down the steps along the gravel paths and down over the daintily close-cropped lawns. Young voices sounded from under the trees. One of the gentlemen took down a paper lantern, picking it like a fruit from its branch, and all the ladies came up to light their cigarettes by it.

The broad walk led away to the right, marked out with hundreds of light-buoys so that none should get out of their course. Nevertheless, it happened that first a tall, somewhat stooping figure of a man, and later, a woman, tall and upright in a pink dress, turned off the wrong way—to the left—and moved away into the dark, both moving more rapidly than any of the others.

"Did you see them?" whispered Sivert.

"Them? Who?"

" Minna and that Sveidal. Creeping off in the dark. Rather smart of them—what ? "

" Very good idea, no doubt," said Emanuel.

" Ah—confess now, you thought it'd make me wild ! " said Sivert, nudging his brother in the ribs. " Confess it ! But there's nobody in the world knows the mysterious workings of my mind. Yes, I reckon it out like this : the engineer fellow's all right to wake up a so-called affection in her breast, but when the right time comes, she'll turn it all over to me. She's inclined to favour him just now, by reason of his railway-engineering-telescope thing ; but suppose I was built differently, now, say with my eyes all round on the underside, like that creature you picked up just now, why, then, *I* should be a rarity, and she'd take me on the spot. But I'm not going to. I know well enough I'm rare as it is, both inside and out. And I'll keep my eyes where they are, spread round my forehead in the old-fashioned style, as you'll be able to see very soon in a gold-lined show-case outside Eiermann's."

The time for the fireworks had arrived, and the guests were gathering in front of the house ready to march down in couples to the open space by the beach.

Nicolaysen the wheelwright—and incidentally leader of the orchestra—having feasted with his musicians on the crumbs from Etatsraaden's table, came out on the balcony and sounded the assembly.

The watchers by the hedge shifted their feet ; their eyes glowed in the dark like the eyes of wild beasts about a white man's camp-fire.

Then the many-coloured serpent moved off. It would pass close up to the hedge—and this was the most exciting moment for the many there assembled.

Those of a modest temperament drew back a little; others, who year after year had watched from the same gaps in the hedge, did not move. They looked at the ladies, and they looked at the gentlemen. Some of the latter bore witness by their gait to the excellence of Etatsraaden's cellar. The young men tore off green leaves and "popped" them between their hands. One could be seen drawing the figure of a heart in the air with the glowing end of his cigar.

Here was Rothe with Fru Weisz, his arm round her waist. And there was Minna with her engineer, the two leaning inward, each towards the other, so that either would have fallen had the one been suddenly removed.

Sivert whispered:

"Look there—all's going just as I could wish. She'll soon be ripe for *me*, now!"

A little behind the rest came Fru van Haag, with Etatsraaden himself.

The Egholms were among those who had drawn back a little when the procession began, but Egholm had involuntarily taken off his hat, and his bald pate being conspicuous in any sort of light, Fruen perceived him, all the same. She judged that his wife must be there too, and waved her white hand till the shawl slipped from her shoulders. She even stood still and called softly, "Good evening, Little Mother!"

There was never any saying what Fruen might or might not do.

Fru Egholm blushed and curtseyed out in the dark; then an idea occurred to her. She nudged Sivert from behind, and said eagerly:

"Go up and say your 'No' and 'Yes' in English."

"Augh! Let me alone," said Sivert, and sprang aside.

Meantime, Fru van Haag had passed on.

There was a moment of expectant silence all round. Big furry moths could be seen blundering against the lanterns. A railway engine whistled somewhere in the distance. Then the first of the maroons went off, and a terrified blackbird shrieked in answer.

A murmur of admiring wonder from the spectators ; rockets were sending up swift-growing orchids to bloom against the depth of the sky. Catherine-wheels whirled round, and sheaves of golden fire burned here and there ; now came a roar, and another, then the fierce, exciting hiss of soaring rockets again.

" Ah, this is something like a fête," said Egholm, and lapsed into a silence of concentrated feeling.

Fru Egholm's eyes glittered. Oh, it was lovely, lovely !

Some of the spectators got beyond control ; they broke through the hedge and trampled on a flower-bed where a rocket had been seen to fall.

The Egholms walked home along Stationsvej, the head of the family leading, with his eyes fixed on the ground. A little behind their parents trailed the two brothers together.

" Oh, hell and all," moaned Sivert ; " why didn't I go up and say ' No ' and ' Yes ' as mother said ? It would have helped me on more than a thousand dollars if I had."

" No and yes ? " said Emanuel, with a smile.

" Yes, or ' Have a drink,' or any other little motto like that. Why didn't I do it ? I might have crept through the hedge and gone after them in the dark— might have been mistaken for anybody ; I might have got up to where Minna was herself ! "

" You're pretty badly in love," said Emanuel.

Sivert shrugged his shoulders.

" Oh, in love with her—it's not exactly that so much. It's more a sort of galloping consumption—galloping after her, you understand. She's getting a bit faded now, and there's no time to lose. But I can remember her when her cheeks were as red and round as the backside of an angel."

Emanuel ruminated for a moment over this mixture of sense and lunacy. Then, with unfeigned interest, he said :

" How on earth do you manage to know exactly how things are, and yet play the goat like you do about it, as if . . ."

Sivert interrupted him.

" I know what you mean. It's due entirely to my remarkable inner qualities. I know exactly how things come about in the world. I know the old man, for instance, will be bankrupt before this year's out. Ask me anything you like, and I'll tell you ! "

He raised his arms in a prophetic gesture, and went on :

" I say unto you—I—yes, and you too, seeing you're my brother—we're the strangest people on earth. We're not like others—we're better. We shall be famous throughout the world one day, you and I. *We're the only people in the world that can think thoughts they don't understand themselves !* Before the old man's tumbled in the ditch, you'll see Minna Lund groaning at my feet. Thus I prophesy before you, and thus is my unalterable will that's not to be shaken. More especially after going to the photographer's to-day, head up, arms down, and paying him four *Kroner* plus one extra for hanging me outside."

" It'll be some time yet before *your* wedding," said Emanuel.

. . . . . .

On the following day Emanuel went back to his work in the bank. He felt something like longing for the long, dry columns of figures.

Three weeks passed before he began thinking vaguely once more about a trip home. And then came a letter—one of his mother's well-known epistles, sealed with a thimble on the back. It seemed a trifle thicker than usual. He opened it, and found eight closely written pages, which set his mind in the greatest excitement. Now he laughed wildly; now he sank into deep meditation; now he flung the letter down furiously, only to pick it up a moment after and read on with staring eyes.

This is what it said:

" My own dearest Boy,—I half expected to see you over here last Sunday, but as you didn't come, I must write and tell you the great glad news: that our own Sivert is now *really and truly* engaged to Minna. Hearty congratulations and thanks to God for your brother, my dear boy. We should go down on our knees and give thanks for this great joy and exaltation. I almost felt I could hardly talk to him like his own mother the first day after. For it does seem a great thing, really, and a thousand times greater than seven brickworks that do more harm than good. For that's what it is. Father's lost his colour dreadfully of late, and they're always coming along to him with bills for this and that, and he's hardly any money to pay with. He doesn't bother about his own business now, and the money in the string's nearly all gone. And it's

all because of the miserable brickworks too that we've got this daddy-long-legs of an engineer tramping about my garden. But God's always gracious all the same, as we can see with Minna and Sivert now. She hasn't been here yet, but she's coming soon, she says. I wish it would be Sunday, and you were home to brighten things up too. Do write if you can come, then I'll ask Sivert to talk to her and get her to make it Sunday, for he's great influence with her, I know. He goes there nearly every day, and they've got a special licence, so they can be married soon—and Heaven bless the happy pair. Truly we've much to be thankful for, and the evil as well as the good. Even for that miserable spectre of an engineer that tramples down my ferns and roses, we should give thanks for it all. For after all it was really him that got Sivert his Minna and so much joy to us all. For that night at Etatsraaden's he got up on a chair—having turned a bit lively after it all, and only natural—and announced he was engaged to somebody in Copenhagen. And Minna had convulsions and had to be taken home, but the day after she wrote to Sivert, and now they're engaged, and thanks be to God for the engineer and the convulsions too. She'll be happy enough with him, I know, when she gets to know him. And that she's a good girl I'm sure, from everything she does. There's a whole lot of boxes of things, now, she's got up in the loft there, from the time when they had the drapery business, and she lets him take what he likes. And I do call that really nice of her, now, though the collars and things are a bit ample, perhaps, having thought at first of *somebody else* that's more in the lanky superior way than our own dear boy.

"So do come, now, and go for a walk with them

through the town, or perhaps in somewhere for a cup of coffee, or whatever's the proper thing for people of your sort. You needn't be here in the house, of course, more than just a minute or so.

" And now to conclude, best love from us all. The cactus with the white hair's got a young one now. But first of all, of course, do remember to be *perfectly serious* all the time and not a sign of anything else. For it would be a sin and a shame to let them see it any other way.—Your loving MOTHER."

Emanuel's feeling, after the first confusion had subsided, was one of strange anxiety and unrest. He could not make out the affair at all. One thing, however, he did know : he was not going home to " brighten it up." On the other hand, he would not willingly destroy a thing which possibly might be of more value than he knew. Minna and Sivert ! It was like harnessing a fiery mare and a billy-goat together. No, it would never do ; it was hopeless from the first.

But the billy-goat had foretold—had wisely foreseen —what appeared incomprehensible !

Emanuel curbed his home-sickness and his curiosity; he sought company in the town, and remained there week after week. Nevertheless, he remained anxiously on the look out towards home, and opened his mother's letters with greater eagerness than ever before. " You are hereby solemnly invited to the wedding on the 28th of September," she wrote one day.

Emanuel wrote to his sister Hedvig, who answered as follows :

" Yes, I am invited too, but I think we had better not. I understand you feel just as I do about it all;

there's that about you and me, anything with a taste of humbug about it makes us sick. And we hate cloves, because we had too much of father's abominable clove tea when we were children. I *hate* humbug. It's the strongest feeling in me. Stronger than love.

" I loved a man once. He was harsh and cruel, and I knew it, but I gave in to it without a word. But I broke it off with him the very day I saw he was a humbug too. That sort of thing must be crushed—whether it's religious madness as with father, or music madness as with the other. He still writes to me. But I don't answer.

" If I ever do marry a man, it'll be one that's sound and honest to the core.

" You may hear something later about me and some one else. I only want to ask Fru van Haag's advice about it first—though she's a humbug too, like nearly everybody else.

" Don't go to that wedding.—Your loving sister,

" HEDVIG."

Emanuel nodded to himself. Yes, he would be like Hedvig. No humbug, no lies and masquerading.

He knew well enough who it was Hedvig meant with the man she had loved—it was the painter, Johan Fors. And Hedvig herself could hardly have failed to see what they said in the papers about that same Johan—that he was now a successful artist in Paris.

No, Hedvig knew her own mind. She saw her way, straight ahead, though it led through fire and water.

But who could it be she was thinking of now—the

other man? A marvel he must be—a pyramid of a man, with four clear-cut sides of smooth stone!

Emanuel took up his pen, while the energy induced by Hedvig's letter was still strong in him, and wrote declining the invitation to the wedding.

XVII

SIVERT'S wedding is over. It was a grand wedding, with lots of people, both in the church and after. The bride's parents were both dead and buried, but the bridegroom had his father and mother; both came, and enjoyed the occasion immensely—especially his mother.

But what is the good of a great occasion when there's no one to talk to about it after? Anna had no one.

She could not talk to her husband—his festive mood passed off the same evening, and he fell back once more to his speculations and worrying over the brickwork business.

Nor, alas, could she confide in Fru van Haag—Fruen had been strangely silent and sad of late, as if she were ill.

Anna wrote to Emanuel—"Why don't you come home, dear? Come as soon as ever you can, so I can tell you all about the wedding. You've no idea what a sight it was, to see Sivert walking up the church in shiny white gloves, led by his father. Minna was handed up the aisle by Engineer Sveidal; she has already forgiven him. We two old people—your father and I—went home early, but we saw the best part of it, all the same. So come home now, and I'll tell you all about it."

And Emanuel came at last. But Emanuel's way is to investigate things thoroughly for himself; conse-

quently, he pays but little heed to his mother's flowery outpourings, and goes off himself, somewhat anxiously, to pay a visit to the newly married pair.

He bought some flowers on the way, and went straight into Minna's shop. Minna came through from the back room, in a black apron with embroidered edges, a bright pair of scissors hung by a silk cord round her waist. Here and there a fragment of thread clung to her dress. Emanuel summed up her appearance in a general impression of something healthy and business-like, which altogether effaced the irony that had been gathering in him till then. It was nice of her too, he thought, that she said not a word about his having stayed away on the occasion of the wedding. She simply gave an order, in a voice of authority, to a young lady in the shop—evidently a learner—and went upstairs with him at once. Wine and glasses were brought out in a moment ; welcome—congratulations—thanks, and so on.

Then, with a business-like air that happily saved the whole thing from being ridiculous, she went round pointing out things high and low—palms and pictures, candlesticks and silver.

" From my uncle—from Rothe—from Sørensen in Randers ; only feel the weight of it ! He was a friend of father's, you know. From Weisz's—from the van Haags. And look here—a golden necklace—that's from my husband himself."

Minna's one little lie ! Emanuel knew that gold chain with the locket well enough. His keen, boyish eyes had seen it hanging round Minna's neck as long as he could remember. But she had polished it up and . . . well, after all, the lie was only meant to make her husband seem a little more than he was.

" Sivert is not at home ? " asked Emanuel.

" My husband's down in the cellar. Sawing wood. I've bought two loads, and he's to cut it all up."

Again this refreshing clearness and frankness in all things. " *I* have bought . . ." " *He's to* cut it up. . . ."

" But what about his glazier's business ? " asked Emanuel again. " Is he giving that up ? "

" No. I don't mind people knowing that there's a glazier down below. But I won't have any sign hung up outside."

Minna's eyes looked wise. She thought the matter over once again :

" A sign's a needful thing for a milliner, or a draper's shop. People may come in from another town, or from the country, and drop in to buy a necktie, or a hat, when they see the sign up outside. But for a glazier—no. If a window gets broken, they send for the *nearest* glazier—and they know where he lives. Well—perhaps," said Minna conscientiously, turning once round on her heel—" perhaps a trifle may be lost that way. But nothing to speak of. And the sign itself costs money. Moreover, it spoils the look of the place, and the property goes down in value. No, *I won't have a sign put up.*"

Emanuel nodded approvingly. After a suitable stay he took his leave, and asked if he might go down the back way ; he wanted to look in and see Sivert. Halfway down the stairs he heard a saw commence to work. He dived down the cellar steps, and noted with mischievous amusement how Sivert dragged away at the saw, working so zealously that he did not hear anyone coming. The sawdust hung like powder in his thin hair. Not until Emanuel had been standing behind him a full minute did he turn, with a frightened glance from the corner of his eyes.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" he said, with relief, and laid down the saw.

"Hope I'm not disturbing you, what?"

Sivert caught hold of his brother and shook him, saying, with a childish expression:

"Oh, don't! You know what women are, with their fancies. I can't help it, can I? And then you know really, it's quite a good idea. I'm sure I'd never have hit on it myself."

"Agreed!"

"Good!—then let's talk of something else. Thanks for remembering our wedding-day — oh, didn't you? Well, never mind. I always say that now whenever I see anybody. Thank 'em, you know, and pleased to see them any time, if they're passing, and yes, thanks, quite a comfortable place, and so on. See how I'm getting on, in manners and that sort of thing! Why, I feel a different man altogether. Sometimes I can't make out what it is that's happened."

"Well, you've got married, old man."

Sivert shook his head, with a curious smile.

"Have I, though? Well, now, fancy—to think that should ever happen to me! And a milliner, too. I must be ever so happy, I'm sure."

"I don't understand a word of it either," said Emanuel seriously.

"Don't understand me being happy?"

"I don't understand how you ever managed to get her."

"Why, that's easy enough, surely. I just wrote her a letter, and said it must be my turn now, seeing there was nobody else she'd any chance of getting at all."

"Sensible man!"

"Yes, it was sensible, wasn't it? That's why I didn't send the letter after all, but wrote another, just the opposite—saying, of course, she could get as many as she pleased, and so on. Yes . . . you see, I've noticed whenever I do anything sensible it always goes wrong."

Sivert was bubbling with laughter. He clambered up on the saw-bench and flapped his wings in idiotic glee.

"I did it! By the celebrated Lord on High, I did it, and it came off. Next day there came an official invitation—imagine what a fright I was in—to be round at her back-stairs entrance at eleven that evening!"

He stepped down, and lowered his voice to a confidential whisper.

"I must tell you, so you can come and persuade me some day that it's not all a terrible dream. I stood there holding the letter, and could hardly read it, and lay awake after all that day, thinking what on earth to do. Then in the afternoon I took off my things and washed myself all over in warm water right to the waist. So as to be ready, in case. Well, as it happened, there was no need of it that evening, but it came in useful after, on the wedding-day. Thanks for remembering our wedding-day, by the way. Hope you'll look in and see us any time . . ."

"Thanks, I've just had the pleasure."

"Oh, I didn't mean it that way. Only as a sort of proverb, you know. But about that wash—do you know what I found? Here, right on my chest, Minna Lund's name, with Faith, Hope, and Charity! I took it as a sign from above. It was really mostly that that helped me to make up my mind."

" Oh—that old tattooing ! "

" Yes," said Sivert, nodding quietly. " It showed up gradually, right inside on the skin."

" Like the paintings under the whitewash in the church ! "

" Exactly."

" Well, go on, old man."

" Interesting to talk to, aren't I ? Ever in your life hear anything so desperately exciting ? Ah, but suppose I wasn't in the mood ? My voice is breaking, I think. And then you come along interrupting me in my work. Just when I was getting on so nicely. Ho—here ! Don't go running away deserting your brother in distress. I'll tell you all about it. Well, you see, after I'd had my bath, I stood all naked for an hour in front of the glass. Then I got out my things, one by one, and put fresh newspaper in the trousers. You remember we always used to do that out west ; it's the finest thing in the world to keep you warm . . ."

" But it's summer ! "

" Never mind. Then I pumped up my bicycle and cleaned up the lamp."

" Frightened, what ? "

" Me ? Lord, no ! you don't know me. But then I pulled myself together and off at a furious pace. It was simply dreadful, really. I can't understand how I ever got through it to this day. She sat there all close up to me on the sofa, life size and more, laying down the conditions as stern as could be. She wanted to get a sort of lease of me, as far as I could see. Well, I agreed to it all, except the last. I said no to that."

" What was it you said ' no ' to ? "

" She asked if I'd expected anything different," said Sivert, with a grin.

"No," he went on, "I didn't interfere with the contract otherwise—best leave it to her, I thought. And anyhow, the banquet—I mean the wedding business—I couldn't have managed that half so well myself. Why didn't you come, you devil?"

"You might have asked Ditlev Pløk."

"I couldn't. I knew he'd burnt his indiarubber collar. But I tell you, you ought to have seen me. I wish there'd been a gramophone in the church."

"You mean a cinematograph?"

"No, I don't. I mean a gramophone. To take down the sound of me walking up the aisle. That was enough. Oh, you don't know. I didn't walk. I strode, dragging one leg a little behind. I pretended to catch my foot in the carpet and stumble. One place, I stopped and stood as if in thought. And when I went up the steps in front of the altar, my trousers creaked."

"*What* creaked?"

"My trousers—the newspapers, you know. Heaps of them. All new. And it seemed quite musical, really. I declare I felt like taking off all my things there and then before the congregation, to show off my fine physique, all scrubbed and scoured. And then the dinner after—I don't mind telling you I was a hero there. Though I couldn't manage to eat up all there was. We had six sorts of dishes at least, with the wine. And then, when we got to chicken and toadstools—my favourite of all—I couldn't. Oh, it was simply beastly. I wouldn't go through that again more than once for anything."

"Did it make you ill?"

"Oh, I soon got over it. It didn't spoil my concert voice, anyhow."

"So you entertained the company with a song?"

"Well, I had to, you know. It was my turn.

Minna did a duet with the engineer man—she was going to, that is. Only she couldn't find the music. Ah, couldn't find it—no, I should think not ! "

" What a pity ! "

" Dreadful misfortune," said Sivert, with a grin. " We spent more than half an hour looking for it all over the house, Minna and Sveidal and me—but we didn't look in the right place, haha ! Never mind—as I said before, my trousers creaked at every step ! "

Sivert was seized with a fit of exultation at the recollection ; he kicked off both his wooden shoes high in the air, and danced round the cellar in his socks.

" And where was the music, after all ? "

" Where ? Don't you see ? Why, here—here in the back of my breeches. I pinched it the same morning. And there it was all the time in the seat of my bridal uniform, creaking as musically as could be. There it was—and here it is now—nearest my skin, and lovely and warm. And here it shall stay till my dying day. Who married Minna, I should like to know, Sveidal or me ? Ho ! No more duets in this house without I'm taking part ! "

Emanuel thought to himself once more : a lusty young mare and a gleeful billy-goat harnessed together.

He shook his head, and said aloud :

" But surely you had to get out of your clothes some time on your wedding-day ? "

" No."

" What ? How do you mean ? "

Sivert changed colour. " Don't let's think about that," he said. " It was awful. I sat there feeling horribly uncomfortable, as if father and God and you were hiding in corners and laughing at me. And she stood up in bed, a dreadful sight, with her hair all loose, and

nothing on but a bathing-dress. 'Take off all your things!' she said. And I did. But then she said I was to take off more still, take off my under pants. So I ran away. Ran in next door to 'my husband's room.' And slept there in my bridal armour with the tablecloth over me. And that's as far as I've ever got."

XVIII

HEDVIG writes to Fru van Haag :

" VRANSTEDGAARD, 24*th March*.

" MY DEAR KIND MISTRESS,—Yes, I can't help thinking of you still as mistress. A hundred times I find myself thinking : What would ' Fruen ' say to this or that before I do it. Up to now, I have managed more or less on your advice ; to do what I liked. I can always hear your voice, the very way you said it ; and it makes a difference too. Not ' Do *what* you like ' but ' Do what you *like* ! '

" Well, and up to now, I have known what I liked, and done it, and been glad of it, and grateful to you. But now I've come to something that may be a great thing in my life, and I can't say whether I like it or like better to run away and avoid it. There's a man who wants me to marry him.

" But I may as well say at once, this is the fourth or fifth time some one's wanted me to, only up till now I've always been sure myself I didn't want to.

" You can help me, I know. And I know you will.

" He's in a dairy, a good honest fellow in every way, and clean and nice as fresh-made butter.

" And that's quite a lot to say for a man, isn't it ? I know enough of the world to know that. I've been in lots of places now, and seen a good deal of the world.

And then all that I learned when I was with you! Oh, you touched my eyes and made me see.

"And I've read lots of books. Augustinus Trillingsbæk—yes, that's his name, worse luck—has read a good deal too, when he was at the Extension School. But now that he's a free man, no power on earth can make him take up a book.

"I won't tire you with telling how we came to meet. It was last summer in Copenhagen. He had come in to fetch his mother from the hospital. (It's her I'm with now.) But I'll mention one little thing to show what he's like. The first few days we knew each other he was shy and serious—I was a *fine lady*, and he hardly dared look at me. But then I went with him to see his mother, and as soon as he was with her, he began suddenly laughing like a madman, and after a while of that, he fell to crying so the tears rolled down his jacket. And he touched my sleeve and my hair.

"It was ridiculous, of course, but I gave him a kiss—the first one. I really felt fond of him at that moment.

"For though I fight against it as hard as I can, I've such a longing to *be loved by some one.*

"What with Augustinus' crying and laughing, I gave up my place with two quite first-rate people, an artist and his wife named Uhde, where I was just the same as a daughter to them, and moved over here to Vranstedgaard, with every prospect of finding myself a dairy-manager's wife, if I don't stand out against it tooth and nail.

"And why should I?

"Well, now, I want to ask: oughtn't a girl to be *looking forward* to her wedding-day? Because I'm not.

" I can laugh, yes, but I've never been really happy since I was a child.

" Once I came very near to being happy. And that was when I was with you, Fru van Haag. It was the evening when we ran out like two schoolgirls and listened outside the church to Johan Fors playing. I laughed and cried with love all night after—very much like my good Augustinus Trillingsbæk.

" I've had two letters, by the way, from Johan Fors. *But I never think of him, and certainly I'm not in love with him.* If so, I shouldn't be writing this to you. And I've never written him a word in answer. He's in Paris now. No, if I saw him crossing the street I'd not so much as turn round to look at him. I rather think I should hang on tighter to my dairyman's arm. For it's *almost happiness* to me to feel some one really cares for me.

" Poor dear Augustinus—he's just come in now, and is sitting just behind me. Ever so quiet. I know he's looking at me all the time, but he never ventures to disturb me the least little bit. He thinks me a fine lady. He loves everything that's ' fine '—that's why he wants to be dairy-manager instead of taking over the farm. As soon as I came here, he gave me a bicycle, and now this Christmas he came and said: ' Here—I've got you a *bicycle catalogue of pianos*—so you can pick out the best for yourself ! '

" Don't think, though, I'm trying to make him out as just simple and foolish. No, sometimes he and his mother can be finer than anyone in their manners. They've never asked me once about my people, still less a word about money matters.

" Do write now and tell me what's best to do about it. Remember I've nobody to ask but you. When I

try to think calmly and sensibly about it, it seems a good chance, and not to be thrown away. But something inside me makes me hesitate. I lie awake at nights, and it always ends in thinking back to the lovely time with you at Knarreby Toldbod. And then I cry, and hope you can help me—and will. I shall always remember you, and I can't think you've quite forgotten your HEDVIG."

Fru van Haag thought over the matter for some days, and then wrote in reply.

"DEAR LITTLE HEDVIG," she began—and then, seeing the three simple words on the paper, in her curious tall hand, she bowed down over the paper and spoiled it altogether by crying over it. Then she felt ashamed of herself, and took a fresh sheet. It was most important that there should be no sign of tears about this letter. It was her business here to be strong—to comfort and advise.

"DEAR LITTLE HEDVIG,—I was *so* glad to get your letter, though it wasn't a very bright one, to be sure. But I've been going about with my head on one side, listening over towards where you were and wondering if there wouldn't come a word from you soon. And here it is at last, and here am I, my little friend; my daughter by God's grace for a little time—but a time I shall never forget.

"You are quite right. You are a creature of modern times, and you go to a specialist. If you've a stomach-ache, you go to a specialist in stomach-aches, and when it's a case of love trouble, you come to me. I've a quarter of a century's experience in that particular line.

"But I must see you before I can help you. You

draw a very good picture with your pen, but nevertheless I must have you over here yourself, and feel your pulse. And that at once. Mind, it's serious. I can tell that much from your writing alone.

"And you will just be in time to say good-bye to me, if you make haste. I'm a shaky old woman now, Hedvig.

"If only we could cure each other, you and I! Come, child; I almost think I could be young again if I held your warm, strong hand in mine. And as for yourself, I think I see a way.

"Come—we have so much to talk about.—Your mistress and friend,

"CLARA VAN HAAG, *née* STEEN."

A week after, Hedvig arrived home unannounced. Her mother was overwhelmed at seeing her so transformed into a lady, both in dress and speech, and dared not take her in her arms, but stood where she was and wept. Her father, on the other hand, welcomed her with enthusiasm. He laid aside all work, just to sit and look at her and talk. "Here's a fine daughter I've got in my old age," he said again and again, in frank admiration. Hedvig had felt a touch of her childish defiance from the old days when she first saw him now, but it soon disappeared. They were neutrals now. And while she was taking in his admiration, there was hardly time for anything else.

"Well, you *have* changed," he said.

"So have you."

"For the better, too?"

"Do you think you *could* change for the worse?" she said thoughtfully. But then they both laughed, and were excellent friends.

Hedvig let him tell her all that she knew only from her mother's brief letters. Mostly of *Fruen*, who had sent good fortune showering down over the house ; of Sivert's marriage, and the brickworks business. He talked continuously of this last, and something seemed to take place within him as he listened to his own words. All through the winter he had felt himself buried alive under mountains of bricks ; he had wrung his hands and wished himself dead. Strange, now, to hear himself describing the brickworks as a magnificent concern, which had brought him daily delight up to now, and would soon be bringing him wealth into the bargain. He sat there, lying himself into happiness, and was happy, really, as he did so.

" And you shall have your share, my girl, never fear, as soon as the bricks are turned out finished, and the money begins to come in. Yes, indeed, you shall have something out of it as well. Trousseau and things. Are you married ? "

" No," said Hedvig, and her face darkened slightly. Nevertheless, it pleased her to find that he did not claim intimacy, but asked as he might of a mere acquaintance : " Are you married ? "

" Not ? Well, never mind. I'll give you a horse to ride, or anything else you like, if it turns out well."

He was silent a moment, turning over the last words : if it turns out well. Then he laughed, with his head on one side, pinched her arm, and said :

" You see, it's a bit of a venture, really. Buying up a whole concern like this for next to nothing, and running the thing for nothing at all. A venture—yes, a game of chance for life and death. But I shall win, my girl. I'll win in the end ! "

Hedvig had dinner at home, and then said she was going round to call on Fru van Haag.

" I'll go too," said her father.

" Oh ? " said Hedvig, raising her eyebrows.

" That is—I mean, if you'll allow me ? "

Hedvig graciously nodded permission.

Father and daugher walked together through the town, and, as it chanced, caught sight of Hr. van Haag going into Vang's Hotel. Neither made any comment, but both felt a sense of relief. A moment later they were at the Toldbod. They went straight upstairs and entered. Fru van Haag was in her own room, seated at the writing-table with a cushion at her back. But at sight of Hedvig she sprang up, and seemed to throw off all ill-health at once. Her white cheeks flushed with youthful colour, and she drew the girl to her warmly. The two looked long into each other's eyes, forgetting all about Egholm for the moment. Then all three sat down close together and talked of many things.

" And you're pleased with her too, Monsieur Egholm, I can see. Or has something gone right with the brickworks ? "

" That too," said Egholm mysteriously.

" But I thought you said the clay was poor."

" Poor ? Did I say it was poor ? It's first rate ! I'll show you a sample, to judge for yourself—look at this ! "

He thrust one hand into a pocket, and drew out a mass of yellow gritty stuff.

" Funny to think you can make bricks out of that," said Fruen.

Egholm sat silent, letting the others talk ; then he cut into the conversation himself all at once. Evidently he had been thinking of something all the time.

" Yes," he said. " My doubts as to the quality of the clay have proved unfounded. The mass holds well together, and we can already consider it certain the bricks will turn out all right. I feel I ought to tell you this at once, because you'll be gone by the time they're finished."

" No, I think not. I think I must wait till after."

" Well, well—but anyhow, as I say, I'm practically certain it will turn out all right now."

" You think so ? "

" I can almost say, I *know* it will," said Egholm firmly.

Shortly after he took his leave. Fruen went with him out into the passage, despite his protests, but when she came back, she was still full of what he had said.

" I can't understand," she said, " how he can be right. I only hope it may be so. Oh, Hedvig, if only we could make that man happy, after life's been so hard to him all along ! "

" He's been hard on others in return," said Hedvig coldly and clearly.

" Of course he has ! He couldn't hit back where his troubles come from. And so he's taken it out of Little Mother and you and the others. And that's why he's an unhappy man."

" I look on father more as a madman than an unhappy man."

" Nonsense, Hedvig. He's *just as much one as the other !* "

Fru Clara crouched down, watching Hedvig with wide eyes. Her voice trembled a little. Hedvig felt strangely moved at the ring of emotion in her words as she went on :

" Ah, think of it—think what a terrible thing to be born with a brain diseased. We others, dear, we go out

into the world with a bank-book to draw on. Kasper Egholm, poor fellow, has no bank-book, but a madness that breaks out the day he falls over a stone and strikes his head on the ground."

Hedvig drew a deep breath and said :

" I don't believe in that sort of stone. Either a man's mad, or he's sane. That's how I look at it."

" Don't you believe in circumstances ? "

" What circumstances do you mean ? What's the stone that upset things for him ? "

" Clara Steen's that stone. Clara Steen it was, in Helsingør. My dear, I thought you understood as much. He was in love with me, you know, and I encouraged him a little. Isn't that a sharp stone enough, Hedvig, a devilish stone to get in the way ? No, but of course you didn't understand. I didn't realise it myself till a few years back. At first—when I came to Knarreby, I used to go and see your people because they were more amusing than the others—and altogether more *human*. But now, it's not amusement only, but affection—and sympathy—and a mournful, conscience-stricken regret. Hedvig, if I can't make your father and those near to him happy some way, I shall go out of the world like a slave. Hedvig, you must help me. That's why I sent for you, really. You must help me, if you really care for me at all."

" How can I help caring for you—after all you've been to me—all you've done for me ? "

" Yes, of course. It's your plain duty to be deeply grateful to me. Didn't I give you the yellow trunk with the handles—an expensive thing, with labels from Rome and Paris, that you were so proud of. Well, don't forget it, that's all. You've got to pay me back for that and all my other benefactions. Didn't you find a

ten-*Kroner* note on your hatpin when the Professor went away? Yes, but *I* put it there, you know. He forgot, just as he forgot about Hr. van Haag's collars. Yes, I've been good to you, and now in return you've got to give up this Augustinus Trillingsbæk for my sake. Don't laugh—can't you hear me praying to you on my knees for that one little thing? Give him to me."

"What do you want with him?" said Hedvig. The tears were gathering in her eyes, despite her smile. She strove to keep them back with her long fair eyelashes, but they grew heavier, and broke through like great dewdrops, and fell on her hands.

"I don't want him at all. Let him stick to his dairy, that's all. Let him go on with his butter and cheese, but . . . That is, of course, unless you've promised him . . ."

"No," said Hedvig. "I've kissed him once or twice. But I've told him as plainly as I could in so many words that he mustn't make any mistake and go thinking I was fond of him. No—and I can tell you, Fru van Haag, that this time, when I came away, he saw the whole thing clearer than I did myself. 'I shan't see you again, I know'—those were his last words."

"Oh dear!" said Fru van Haag, all sympathy now. "And what did you say?"

"I said, no one could say. But it was a dreadfully sad parting."

"Be thankful you've got it over now, child. In a little while, perhaps, it might have been too late. It might have killed you."

"We were to have been married in May."

"Terrible!"

"He's a good man, and nice in lots of ways. But of course . . ."

"He! Yes, he's good enough. But you—you're an egoist, a criminal! You *know* you don't love him! Good heavens, is the world standing still, then? Are we to have that same crime of ignorance again, generation after generation? Look at me—I'm one that was a coward in love. Do you think it was for love I married Hr. van Haag? I took him because he was decently dressed, and kept his nails clean; because, as you put it yourself, it seemed quite a good match. And so we struggled on, the way you know. He hated me, and I hated him. Sometimes I went off travelling about and taking him round to places, to make him a little smarter in manners and appearance. But the last few years I've stayed at home, because all my money was gone, and because I had you and the others to console me. I stood it pretty well, really, his talking at me at night and all the other horrible things about him. I was a martyr, of course, and when you once feel that, you can take almost anything smiling. But now I'm going away. Why's that, do you think?"

Fru van Haag looked at Hedvig with a faint smile, and stroked her hands.

"Yes, my martyrdom's over now. Slap-bang—all over now. And a black mark on my forehead instead of a martyr's crown. *Hr. van Haag's fallen in love!* With Fru Vang—the woman whose husband drowned himself—the woman with the fringe and the smile—the pious one. It must have been going on for a long time, I fancy, before I noticed it. I knew he was always going down to the hotel, where she looked after the kitchen and things, but—well, can you imagine *Hr. van Haag* and *being in love* in the same breath? No. Then one day I saw him sitting at table, at lunch, with some violets in his hand. He was fiddling about with

them such a funny way. Then in the afternoon the pair of them came up together—and he tells me Fru Vang is going to take over the housekeeping here—from the first of May. As housekeeper-maid—or whatever you like to call it. And the violets were stuck in her breast with a thick pin."

"Oh, that horrible slimy creature! I wonder you didn't spit in their faces!"

"I'll tell you what I did, Hedvig. I laughed at them—laughed desperately—couldn't help it."

"Well, that was a good thing, anyway."

"No, it wasn't. But I simply couldn't help it. I was so ashamed of myself after. That awkward woodeny smile of his, it was like an accusation against *me*; for having kept him shut out from love for twenty-five years."

Hedvig thought for a moment. Then she said:

"If anyone's to blame—why, surely it must be between you. Hr. van. Haag's as bad himself. He wanted you, you said so yourself."

"Ah, my dear, it's the one that *knows* that's always to blame. I knew, my dear, I understood, but my conscience never spoke till now—and now it's rather late, isn't it?"

"I don't see—I'm not sure you've anything to blame yourself for now."

"Yes, you do know, my dear. Why did you write to me at all?"

Hedvig shook her head, but the denial was in itself an admission.

Fruen went on:

"And so I'm going away now. We can't have a woman in the house that's my servant and my husband's mistress, can we? There's some sense in that, you

must admit. I forgot to tell you I've been left some money just lately—a blessing, indeed. Quite a lot—the price of nearly twenty grand pianos. It's a nuisance I can't use it for something better, but I must live. I'm going to Frankfurt first, to my brother. He's a famous man, you know, and dreadfully dull."

Fru Clara took an orange from a big bowl and began to peel it.

"There," she said, offering Hedvig half. "A foretaste of the south. Take it, Hedvig. And thank you ever so much for Augustinus. All may come right yet, as long as I can feel I've really saved you from something. Hedvig—a lovely young thing like you—the world would be darker if you *went out* in that way. Yes, I think I can go away now. You'll have to help your father over things if these bricks don't turn out as he hopes. Every day I stay here's an added humiliation for me, but I should have to stay if you weren't here."

"Yes," said Hedvig firmly. "I'll manage to make him happy again. I've no hatred left towards him now."

"Couldn't you go a step farther than that," said Fruen earnestly.

"I don't think I'm happy enough myself to be really kind to others," said Hedvig, half to herself.

A glittering reflection lit in Fru Clara's eyes; she nodded, and said:

"You've every right to say so, I suppose. Now, you mustn't mind if I talk of something else. Will you go with me to Copenhagen, now, when I go? Only two or three days. You will come back here after, of course."

Hedvig promised gladly.

Once more Fru Clara changed the subject abruptly.

" Tell me—what papers did you take in over there ? "

" *Varde Dagblad.*"

" Is that all ? "

" No other newspapers. But we used to get *Højskole-bladet* and *Ugens Nyheder*. And I had books sent from Copenhagen, and . . ."

" Good—very good ! " said Fruen.

When Hedvig took her leave, Fruen went with her a little way. They walked arm in arm along the railway lines by the harbour. There was a soft, delicious melancholy in the air ; Hedvig breathed tremulously. Even an ordinary railway truck, standing there all asleep under its tarpaulin, seemed eloquent in its dry smell of dust and oil. As a schoolgirl, Hedvig had played " bathing " in one of those springy tarpaulins, flapping and swimming about till the blood burned and stung in her cheeks. And once—later on—she had gone out on just such an evening as this and called up a little lad from his play among the railway trucks, to carry a letter. . . .

Even the blue Belt seemed to breathe a melancholy perfume—reminding one of salt tears. . . .

Down beyond there was the same little plank stage where Johan had taken his boat and rowed away so furiously that night.

Hedvig's lips trembled. A gentle womanly hand rested lightly on her arm—a few days more, and that hand would be outstretched in farewell.

Alone in the world. No father nor mother. True, they lived, but not in her world. No Augustinus even. Augustinus Trillingsbæk—his very name, and all that belonged to him, had become distasteful to her now. It all seemed sour and forbidding, like stale milk.

No, Hedvig was alone in the world now—alone, with

none but Hedvig. She cowered in dread and wretchedness close to Fru van Haag walking so silently by her side.

The evening light out over the water and over the dark shores of Jutland was the colour of dark hellebore.

XIX

FRU VAN HAAG went down herself to Søren Vognmand and ordered a carriage to meet the eleven o'clock train. She and Søren had grown great friends; ay, this was something different indeed from the first day he had driven her from the station; eh, my dear, but she paid him twice over every time; first the price of the job, and then a smile and a word or so beyond, each worth 1½ *Kroner* at the least.

To-day Søren is hard put to it to make out what Fruen means. She is so queer to-day. Ordinarily, she would just say: a carriage at such and such a time, please. Now, she is asking if Søren hasn't a finer carriage, something special.

"Finer than the one we always take? And isn't that easy enough? Why, 'tis soft as a cradle, surely."

"Yes, I know. But, Søren, what do we want a carriage to seat four for when there's only two of us? Haven't you one that'll just take us two and the coachman on the box?"

"No, indeed, I wouldn't have Fruen drive in any but the finest, with coronet on the door and flourishes and 'S. S.—Søren Sørensen' under. That's me. But to seat two—well, there's the little dogcart."

"Let me see it."

"It's this way. There, there she is."

"No, I don't like that."

"Well, now, what did I say? Though, to be sure,

it's a good little cart enough. And if there's too many seats in the other, why, we can take one out."

"Could you, now?" said Fruen, brightening up.

"Why, no, to tell the truth, it can't be done." Søren had not expected to be taken at his word.

"Oh, what a pity!"

"But if as Fruen was feeling anxious like, lest a certain monkey of a creature should want to sit down opposite and stare at her all the way—why, we might put a big trunk on the opposite seat, so it can't be moved."

"Oh, Søren, you're a genius. The eleven o'clock train, then, Søren. But don't come too early. And as soon as you get to the house, you'll find a big trunk on the steps, and put it up on the seat at once."

"Right! And now, which would you like, the blacks or the roans?"

"Take the roans, and remember, not too early."

"I'll remember every bit."

Next day Hedvig Egholm was at the Toldbod early. They packed up the last of the things, and went through the rooms once more. Anything forgotten now would be lost for ever.

"Oh—my hyacinths! Give me a hand, Hedvig. We mustn't leave that behind. Here's the key of the big trunk.

"It won't go in—the frame's too big. No, it's no good. . . ."

"Then we'll take it with us as it is. I did it myself, Hedvig, and it dates from before the Fall, so we mustn't have it defiled now. Hedvig, you have it, will you? Hang it up in your room. We can stop at the house going by and leave it there."

Hedvig thanks her quietly. She has a hundred

things already that Fru van Haag has given her in remembrance, but nothing that pleases her so much as this. These painted flowers, the work of a girl, have something of Fru van Haag's soul in them.

Little creaking steps can be heard from the bedroom ; Hr. van Haag is busy with an extra special toilet in honour of Fruen's departure. He opens the door and inquires down the passage :

" Why isn't the carriage there ? "

Dagmar will ask her mistress.

Meantime, one of the customs men drags the two trunks down to the stone steps. It is late. A boy comes up with a big bouquet of white roses, which Dagmar carries up to Hr. van Haag.

" Why isn't the carriage there ? " he asks.

" Fruen said she didn't know."

" Put the flowers on the bed. And then go down and see if you can see it coming."

Dagmar goes quietly out into her kitchen and sits down on a wooden chair by the stove. *She's* not a fool ; she knows that when you can see the carriage, it's there already, seeing it only comes from Søren Vognmand's round the corner. Moreover, Dagmar is leaving on the first, and doesn't care. Stay on under Fru Vang—not if she knows it !

Then at last Søren Vognmand rattles up, turns in front of the house, and drives up to the door. He jumps down from his seat, and with a mighty heave swings the trunks up on to the front seat of the open carriage. Then up to the box again to deliver his famous pyrotechnic cracks of the whip over the horses' heads.

Fru van Haag and Hedvig have been standing ready with their things on, looking at the clock in a

fever of anxiety lest Søren should obey his instructions too well and come too late for the train.

Then Fru Clara walks down the steps of Knarreby Toldbod for the last time—walks with her peerlessly free and graceful carriage, incomprehensibly young. A strange being, Fru Clara—with a wonderful gift of eternal youth, and hopelessly unable to find her way to decrepit old age. A permanant defiance of her birth certificate was Fru Clara. Hedvig and she looked like two friends of the same age.

Fru Clara takes her seat ; Hedvig gets in after, holding the picture in her hands and looking about for a safe place to put it.

" Drive on, Søren."

At the same moment Old Poulsen comes edging out from the office, and shambles down to the carriage. His lower jaw moves up and down once or twice without a sound. By some accident his uniform cap has slipped awry, and sits cocked irreverently on one side of his dingy grey hair. Alas ! Poulsen's head had once been wreathed with dark, curly locks.

" Søren—stop ! "

Poulsen holds a paper in his hand. Baring his head, he hands the document up to Fru Clara—a beggar, proffering a petition to the queen !

" Oh, did you come to say good-bye, Poulsen ? Thanks, thanks a thousand times. We've been good friends ever since I first came. I shall always think kindly of you, be sure of that. A letter ? Thanks."

" The speech," says Poulsen. He cocks his hat awry again, and his gums mumble something inaudible.

" The speech, yes, of course," says Fru Clara kindly, as if humouring a child.

" You'll never come—again ! " The foolish old

face is wrung with pain; the words are a cry of anguish.

Fru van Haag takes his hand and looks generously into his eyes.

"I'll read it, yes. And keep it. But—Poulsen"—Fruen turns to Hedvig, and the pair exchange a single eloquent glance—"will you take this picture as a little gift from me? I painted it myself many years ago. You've always been so good and kind, and I want to thank you."

Hedvig and Fru Clara together hand the hyacinths to Poulsen, who takes the picture, overwhelmed as if by a weighty burden.

Fru Clara has yet a few words to say, but her gentle speech is drowned by an angry voice addressing Søren in terms of abuse. Van Haag himself has just come down. His dress is the acme of neatness, but his face is flushed with anger. He has had to *run* down the stairs. A man in his position, in his newly tailored creases, to run . . . !

Hr. van Haag waves his big bouquet threateningly at Søren, and says:

"And where do you suppose I am to sit?"

Søren has given but little thought to the question; he points, however, without hesitation, at the scanty vacant space beside his own broad self, and says:

"Here."

"On the box! Are you mad? Take those trunks out of the way at once!"

"I can't do without the trunks, Julius."

"Then I shall stay at home."

"Very well."

"But it's ridiculous. The very idea! Do you want to make a fool of me before the whole town? Oh,

well, then—there, take these roses, I got them for you. Carry them yourself—don't give them to Hedvig. For the look of the thing, at least."

"*Farvel,* Julius."

Julius van Haag draws his heels together; his silk hat flashes three times in the air behind the carriage as it rolls away. An immaculate figure from top to toe. But behind him, up against the wall, stands a crushed and flattened scarecrow, holding in its crooked fingers a little painting in a gold frame. One sleeve has worked up high above the wrist, revealing an instrument of torture in the shape of a tight starched cuff. Old Poulsen, staring rigidly down the empty street. . . .

Søren drove at a furious pace through the town; he could trust his cattle, and knew what they could do.

Fru Clara leaned back, sniffing the acrid smell of sweating horse-flesh. The sun was full in her face; she looked neither to one side nor the other, but a smile gathered on her lips.

"Take the wire off, dear, will you?" she said, handing the roses to Hedvig. "Carefully, there's a dear."

The carriage turned off the cobbled way now into Stationsvej, where the wheels crunched firmly as over a sanded floor. Egholm stood by the hedge, and bowed and scraped as they passed; his wife half rose, and waved a white handkerchief. A moment later they were at the station. The train was late; there was plenty of time.

"Thank you, dear things," said Fruen, patting each of the horses on the neck. She pulled at their forelocks, and then, after a hasty glance to either hand, divided the roses between them. But the roans had no taste for such refinements; they flung the roses aside into the dust.

"Hi, you brutes!" cried Søren. "Nice manners, indeed!"

But Fruen pressed Søren's hand in farewell, and pressed it once again, this time with much money.

"All the same, there's not many of your sort," said Søren, nodding thoughtfully as he spoke.

The train sang its way in over the sunny green-sprouting fields. Fruen and Hedvig sat facing each other. They spoke but little—there were others in the compartment—but glanced at each other now and again with a little nod. And Hedvig marked how Fruen's eyes grew brighter with increasing content for every station added to the distance between them now and Knarreby. She began playing tricks. She bought up the whole stock of the sweetmeat man on Odense station, and paid him to go round distributing peppermints and chocolates and acid drops to all who passed. People thought the man was mad, and this amused Fru Clara intensely. A minute before the train moved off again, the man came running up with eyes aglow—he had still a whole box of sweets left—here; four *Kroner*. Fruen bought this box too, and gave it back to him at once—for his own consumption exclusively, she explained, with great seriousness.

At Nyborg they found the morning papers from Copenhagen. Fru Clara bought one of each, and after changing over to the ferry, where she and Hedvig had coffee at a little table on the upper deck, Fruen began to read. The wind tore at the paper; she had to fold it up into a tiny square. It was strange to see her reading so eagerly—newspapers did not interest her as a rule. She put down the first one on the seat when she had read it, sat on it herself, and took another.

"May I look?" said Hedvig.

"Do you want one?" said Fruen. "All right—but wait a minute."

She turned the pages, tore one out, and passed Hedvig the rest.

"Censorship?" said Hedvig, with a smile.

"Yes—for the present. You're only used to the provincial papers, you know."

"I'm not in the provinces now. And I *have* seen Copenhagen papers before, you know."

"Read what I give you, now, and don't ask questions."

Hedvig was slightly annoyed at this. What was the meaning of this sudden protectioning attitude? Why should Fruen tear out a page—and hide it in her bag? Really, Hedvig felt it was beyond a joke. But as the paper fluttered in her mistress's hand, she caught a glimpse of a word—a name—Johan Fors.

Her face turned pale and seemed to shrink; she breathed with difficulty as she asked:

"What does it say about Johan Fors?"

"Nothing—oh, well, I suppose it's too late now. Only that he's giving an exhibition of his things in Copenhagen. I knew he was going to—but I wanted to see what the papers said about them first."

"Isn't he in Paris, then?"

"The pictures were sent from Paris—it says so here."

"I should so like to see what it says," said Hedvig.

"Oh, well, if you want to," said Fru Clara, handing over the paper. "I thought you regarded him as your spiritual enemy—as one of the humbugs."

"I should like to read about it—and I should like to see the pictures awfully."

" Well, we'll go and look at them one day when we've time."

" I've always been to all the exhibitions, and then I was with those artist people for quite a time," said Hedvig excusingly.

" Well, well, if you think you'd like to."

" Yes," said Hedvig, gazing far out over the Great Belt. " Yes, I *should* like to."

A west-bound ferry passed them, and they noticed how the flock of gulls deserted it now that it was nearing land, and came over to their own to make the trip once more. The birds came gliding up alongside, and shrieked out a bright little greeting. One of them settled on the mast—not from weariness, no, merely to scratch its head. That done, it was on the wing again at once. How far removed they seemed from everything unclean, these children of the wind and the sea. Their breasts were gleaming white, like newly washed and ironed things ready for a ball. Lovely, delicate young ladies, far above anything so vulgar as work. All these humans on board were merely their attendant slaves. " Food," cried the winged young ladies, and food was given them at once. They ate in the air, where all was clean and fresh, dropping the residue with the utmost delicacy, almost coquettishly, into the water.

Hedvig turned from the gulls and asked suddenly:

" Why should I hate his things ? "

" No, why ? "

" Surely art can give us the nearest we can get to real happiness ? "

" Have you ever tried to be an artist yourself in any way ? "

Hedvig laughed. " No, I think I care too much for art to spoil it with my own coarse fingers."

She spread out one hand as if in illustration, and, seeing that her fingers were soft and slender after all, she added:

"I suppose really it's because I'm not an artist by nature. But surely there must be some people on earth to just appreciate art—other people's art. Pictures, for instance. Or books. Art does lift one above earth. And I think however much humbug there may have been in him—with his playing in the church at midnight—and that sort of thing—it must have got rubbed off him now out in the world. I'm sure he had talent enough for anything."

"You're feeling quite fond of him, it seems to me."

Hedvig did not answer at once; but she was not disconcerted, only thinking it over in her mind.

"Could I ever be fonder of him than I was the day I left him? Impossible. And isn't that enough? My will is stronger than my heart—I don't want to be *my mother* over again. For that's what it would have meant. I felt myself that I must either go—turn my back on him and go for good—or throw myself at his feet as he stood there in the boat, bareheaded, golden-haired, splendidly handsome, but with devil and tyrant in his eyes. There's no such creature in all the world. Dear Fru van Haag, I feel myself far above everybody in the world—yes, even you—when I think that he loved me for just those five minutes or whatever it was. But why did he love me? Because I was proud. And what did his love make of me? A slave. Now, can you understand that my way must lead away from him, that I must turn my back on him and go? Cold as a stone—and with the fire of five minutes' love within."

They reached Copenhagen that evening, drove to

the hotel, had a bath and some dinner, and were in time for a theatre after. The next few days were spent chiefly in shopping. Fru van Haag threw herself into the delights of feminine finery as a swimmer into the sea. She had money now, and did not intend to bury it. She wanted to infect Hedvig as well. As soon as she perceived the girl lingering awhile with some soft material between her fingers, Fru van Haag pressed her insistently, wouldn't she take that, now? How many yards? What—didn't want it? Extraordinary person!

No—Hedvig shook her head. Nevertheless, as was but natural, she would be standing there a moment later, looking at her arm through some light silken stuff that seemed woven of the sea-water itself. Not even this, however, became hers; her lot proved to be a dress of black satin embroidered with violets. She disappeared into it like a bee into a flower, and when her head peeped forth, and she saw herself in the glass, she laughed till her eyelashes quivered.

Fru van Haag sat down in a wicker chair, and drew a deep breath of approval.

Hedvig was lost now for good. She bowed down before a pair of square-toed patent leather shoes, and made obeisance to fantastic hats.

So she became a princess in Copenhagen, and next morning, when the two ladies set out from the hotel, in bright sunshine with a fresh breeze from the Sound, on their way to the exhibition, people turned to look at them, as if admitting with their eyes that the Lord had taken pains over this piece of work, and with excellent results here were two ladies who did Him credit.

"We'll separate now," said Fru van Haag, as they reached the place.

"Whatever for?" asked Hedvig, with some disappointment.

"Then we can each go where we like. See you later on."

Hedvig bought a catalogue, and went in to the left; Fruen had gone to the right.

There seemed to be hardly more than a couple of visitors besides themselves in the whole place. A noble-looking old gentleman, with white hair, walked quietly through on the matting. A schoolmistress, sadly eroded by the ravages of time, kept stringently a picture's length ahead of him, hurrying forward with hunted eyes whenever he glided nearer. The girl at the lottery board was reading *The Scarlet Pimpernel.*

Hedvig sat down on a yellow sofa and opened her catalogue. She read the childish titles of the works: "Two Cows." And lower down, "Two Spotted Cows." Now she came to the section headed Johan Fors: "An Old Man in the Woods"; "Young Swedish Girl on a Windy Day"; "Study from the Nude"; "Nymphs at Play." Johan was exhibiting twelve pictures in all.

Hedvig crushed the book in her hand and rose. She could not lie to herself—it was Johan's work she had come to see—not to sit on a yellow sofa and look at two cows and three cows. Yes, her heart was beating crookedly, irregularly; she was interested to see how this man had turned out.

She caught up the old gentleman and the ravaged schoolmistress; some instinct told her where Johan's pictures would be.

She was there now, in a fine, light room; facing the door hung a large picture with trees and water and a bowed figure—evidently Johan's chief work—

"the old man," which all the papers had praised so much.

Hedvig steps nearer—the water, yes, that is Little Belt, the trees are the dark firs outside Knarreby, and the old man—was her father. He seemed at that moment to raise his head and look at her with a burning glance.

Hedvig could hardly stand upright, so violent was the force of the sudden impression.

Hark, the murmur of the Belt, the whispering of the wind in the long, parched grass, and the stiff needles of the firs. The old man is kneeling, his hair fluttering like an uncombed fringe about his bald head. And beneath his clasped hands, with thin fingers intertwined, a little heap of white, semi-transparent stones—his sacrifice to God.

The whole was wrapped in a strange, misty light, giving an irresistible impression of a scene from ancient, ancient days.

But it was not this light, nor the melancholy lapping of the waves that Hedvig felt most keenly, though she had never before seen canvas thus transformed to life. No, it was the man's face. Oh, aged man, what had he not drunk of the bitter cup of life to cut those furrows on his brow and set that mark of wretchedness upon his lips! Here is a hand that would stroke his cheek—but the foot turns to flee from him, in fear of those uncanny eyes. Good, kindly eyes, but with so much suffering in their depths that a poor girl turns away in fear. How he must have cursed that very strength and hardiness in himself, that let him live after the slow fires of experience had burned the very eyes out of his head!

Hedvig stood before the picture, herself hardly a

living thing. But now came voices—coming nearer. A voice of exaggerated sweetness, spelling out the words it spoke—the schoolmistress, no doubt. "The res-tau-rant," she said. Another voice saying, "Er" and "Yes" and "I'm not quite sure . . ."—a man's voice.

Hedvig looked down at her catalogue—waiting till they had passed. Just for a moment she glanced up—yes, it was the schoolmistress, but the man was not her noble old gentleman. . . . Hedvig's heart came to a sudden stop and then leapt on again, but her brain still worked with something like its normal calm, and noted that *here was Johan Fors talking to that woman.*

Now he met her glance—both he and Hedvig started violently.

The schoolmistress addressed herself to Hedvig. "I beg your pardon—have you been all round?"

"All round?"

"Yes; I've been all through the place twice at least. And I cannot find the restaurant. This gentleman has been round too, without finding so much as a cup of coffee."

Hedvig had a vague idea the woman was talking of voyages round the world. Oh, the whole thing was a dream—or perhaps the woman was mad.

"Thank you—I do not want any coffee," she said in her dream.

"But have you been round?"

"Round? No."

Johan Fors broke in suddenly, with great eagerness:

"Oh yes, I know now—I'm nearly sure it's that way—just through there and down the stairs."

But the little schoolmistress had scented something

clandestine between the two; she *eyed* them with a famished glance from one to the other, murmured her thanks, and walked disconsolately away.

Johan and Hedvig were alone. They shook hands—he with the same firm grip from his journeyman-painter days, though his hand was smooth and delicate now, and there was something like a gleam of higher, more spiritual intelligence over his brow. His clothes, too, were different altogether now. He laughed, and held Hedvig's hand long in his own, pressing it different ways, as if to assure himself it was the one. Waves of keen pleasure passed over his face.

Hedvig spoke first.

"I did not answer your letters," she said. "I'm so dreadfully sorry now that I didn't. But I don't suppose anyone but myself can understand why it was. But I'm so dreadfully sorry, all the same."

"Oh, never mind about that little delay."

"Delay! I'm afraid it can't be judged so lightly as that either."

"What else should it be? I've the answer here now. Here you are yourself. I'm holding your hand—you grant me that little hand. You don't even call for the police, but calmly let me stand here and crumple it up as I please. Frøken Egholm, what better answer could I wish for than that you do not despise me at all, but, on the contrary, treat me as an equal?"

Johan was not a painter's man now, either in his manner or his words. He stood with his back to his pictures—works that the finest judges in the country had praised beyond all bounds. And now he feared lest Hedvig should be confused in her judgment and take

him as one with his work; therefore he was more than ever modest and humble in his speech.

Said Hedvig:

"I have been standing here looking at the old man. I've no idea how long. It was like being in another world, to look at that picture."

She would have said more, but could not utter the words.

Johan, sated with fame as he was, managed to flush unmistakably; he grasped her hand and thanked her shyly.

"I'll show you the others," he said. "Here's an Italian monastery. We got there late in the evening, and it was cold. So we lit up a fire on the stone slabs; our newspapers and travelling books flaming up. But it made a splendid light—and it *is* a splendid light. I caught it. That man there is Lars, his pictures are hanging here somewhere; the others are foreigners. Two hours' work—two and a half, perhaps, no more. Oh, I never get tired of looking at that picture."

Johan stepped closer, looking it over as a father might a child. Then he sprang three paces back and looked again.

He explained each picture to Hedvig in turn. To tell the truth, he praised every one of them to the skies, and in this he was exactly like his old self from the Knarreby days. But with all the resemblance there was a striking difference; he praised his work, not in order to impress, but merely to share the joy he had honestly won. His eyes shone blue as the sky in spring as he talked.

Hedvig thanked him—and at once he thanked her again.

This was overdoing it, and he knew it, but those cool, silky hands of hers were irresistible.

" If we walk on a little, we shall meet Fru van Haag," said Hedvig.

" Yes."

" Aren't you surprised ? "

" Everything that's nice seems possible now that I've met you. And I know she's going to Italy and all the rest of it. You must remember we've written to each other often. She has been as the dearest mother to me from the day she found me. . . . Look here, what do you say to going out somewhere, all three—to the woods, or somewhere by the sea, and talk over old times ? "

" Yes, if Fru van Haag will come too. . . ."

" Come ! " said Johan Fors, with eager eyes.

But they did not find the one they sought. There was hardly a soul in the exhibition building now. Then Johan asked an attendant :

" Have you seen a lady—handsome, elegantly dressed—oh, how would you describe her, Frøken Egholm ? "

" In a white jacket and white hat."

" Yes," said the man—he looked like an old colonel — " that was the one that was running about after a cup of coffee somewhere. She's gone now."

Johan and Hedvig burst out laughing.

" No ; the one running round was another one. Haven't you seen a tall, slender woman . . . ? "

" Ah yes, there were two—quite true. First there was another one, but she came again after with the one —your one—and then they went off together. Yes, it's right enough," said the colonel, waving a hand as

if to ward off further discussion. "We don't serve coffee here, you know."

Johan and Hedvig withdrew, and held a council of war. It would be just like Fru van Haag to strike up acquaintance in that way with a perfect stranger, as long as the person in question were sufficiently out of the ordinary. No doubt she would come back some time. But when? If they were going out for a drive, as they thought, why, they must go now, opined Johan, scratching his head.

"But it wouldn't be nice, surely, to go off like that without Fru van Haag?"

Johan met the difficulty smartly.

"Not nice—well, and was it nice of her, now, to go running off like that without a word or a message, and leave us here worrying ourselves to death, not knowing what's happened? All for the sake of a miserable cup of coffee. No, really, you know, that sort of thing's not done in decent society."

Johan really looked angry. Hedvig laughed and said:

"Well, what are we to do?"

"You write a few words on a bit of paper and leave them with the man here."

"Right—have you a piece of paper?"

Johan tore a leaf from his notebook. Hedvig thought for a moment, wrote a few words, and handed it back to him, whereupon they both doubled up and laughed mischievously.

The message ran:

"I've gone off with some one for a cup of coffee. Don't wait. Hope you don't mind.

"HEDVIG."

A little later Hedvig and Johan were racing out in a big grey car towards Dyrehaven. On reaching the park, they got out, and Johan jested childishly with the chauffeur about the dinner he was to order down at the hotel. Johan had an irresistible way of making a friend of anyone he pleased. All in a moment he and the chauffeur were just a couple of red-headed boys, comrades and equals, planning a piece of fun.

"If the shrimps are ripe—as to that I can't say," said the chauffeur. "They catch 'em, you know. But there's lobster, of course. They're bought. And better eating too. Nothing much in shrimps, to my mind. What do you say yourself, now? No."

Hedvig stooped to fasten a shoelace, and felt her heart leaping and laughing sweetly within her.

"And then about dessert now? Something extra, with cream, eh?" The chauffeur laid his head on one side with the air of a connoisseur.

"With cream, by all means, yes."

"Done, then." The chauffeur started his car, and dashed off proudly, saluting, with curved fingers to his cap.

Johan and Hedvig walked under the great beeches, walked a long way clean across all the marked-out roads and paths. Neither spoke a word, but they seemed entirely in agreement at every change of direction. The air was sunny and full of the scents of spring. Both raised their heads to listen when a bird gave tongue. Johan knew them—that was a bullfinch—that was a tit—*pink, pink.* Hedvig knew them, too; so what need of caging their fresh impressions in any words? Tiny delicate twigs snapped underfoot, and from the hills with their carpet of brown leaves came endless numbers of anemone-maids running towards them.

A pleasant place to walk. The blood rose to their cheeks. They turned round by a thicket and came to a green open space, where a score of deer were grazing. They stood watching the animals for a while; then Hedvig moved off. Johan did not notice it until she was three paces off, but in a moment he was at her side again, and this trifling little episode was enough to set them both laughing, with more enjoyment than seemed strictly warranted.

" You're a good walker, Frøken Egholm."

" Yes, there are not many that can tire me out."

" That walk of yours annoys me—hurts me—makes me thoroughly miserable."

Hedvig looked at him uncertainly.

" Don't you see—it's a thing that can't be painted. I couldn't even paint it myself, though I can *see* it. You can paint a dance, or a person running. But no one can ever paint a young woman walking through the woods in spring."

" No ? "

" Yes."

" But you said no ! "

" Ah, but if one would . . ."

" One—is that you ? " asked Hedvig, nervously fingering the buttons of one glove.

" No, you, Frøken Egholm. If you'd let me paint you. For, to tell the truth, I've never seen it before to-day. I don't know how to explain . . ."

Johan put up one hand to his eyes, as a man does when trying to see a thing more clearly in his mind. A moment later he said :

" Frøken Egholm—you had another name once—a little name . . ."

Hedvig buttoned away at her glove; then suddenly

she finished, looked him frankly in the eyes, and said :

" I was ' *Hedvig* ' once—and you used to say ' *Du* ' instead of ' Frøken.' And I'm both still, if you like. The other way's simply silly—at least I think so."

Johan stood before her, shaking his head, and said :

" You make it all so dreadfully hard for me."

" I don't think so. How ? "

" Why . . . you say I may call you ' Hedvig ' and say ' *Du* ' to you. But I expected you to say no. And when you said no, I was going to beg and pray of you to say yes. And throw myself at your feet. And now—I'm just miserable because I can't say it."

Hedvig's eyes filled with tears.

" Oh no—you mustn't be miserable," she said.

" But—but there's such a lot I had to say. I love you, you know. But how am I to tell you ? Listen . . ." He took her hand and held it as if weighing it in his own. " I can see, Hedvig dear, that you don't run away from me, and thrust me aside, but I *daren't* believe my own senses. I feel I must go on my knees to you. There's something—something from the old days that I've got to ask pardon for."

" No, no, there's nothing," said Hedvig. " We had to grow up first, both of us ; that was all."

Then Johan took her strongly in his arms. He lifted her up, and walked backwards and forwards with her for a while, as if he had forgotten to set her down again.

" Strange. . . . Strange," he said again and again.

His face was so serious now—Hedvig even found, to her surprise, something of a resemblance to the old sorrow-burdened man on the picture.

" What is so strange, Johan ? "

" It's so strange that a thing you've thought out over and over again a thousand times can still seem new and wonderful. For I've cared for you, always, and never for any other, and I've pictured to myself you walking with me in a wood, and how you should be mine. And now it's come. But I never thought you as lovely as you are now—if I had, I could never have waited to grow up, as you say. It was right, you know ; we have to grow up first. And only to think how we've gone together, as it were. Here are you, a queen among all the women in the world, and I—I'm nothing compared to you, Hedvig—but in my work . . . Anyhow, now I've got you, I'll paint the world to bits. I'll be a *great* artist now, Hedvig. You—you electrify me somehow. No, I'll tell you what it is ; now, listen. Do you know that feeling when you're walking by the sea on a summer day ? Feeling hot and tired—and there *is* the sea. All blue and transparent water—and the white, cold, glittering sand beneath. Do you know what I mean ? "

" Yes—I know," said Hedvig, with serious attention. They were walking slowly up the big hill now. Johan held her hand in his, but his eyes were looking up and out to a great distance. His brow was slightly furrowed ; he was trying hard to paint his picture just as he saw it.

" Good !—but do you know how one can feel a simply maddening desire to jump out into the cool, clear water, like a sort of thirst in every nerve, a thirst that *must* be quenched ? "

" Yes, I know," said Hedvig, with bowed head.

" Hedvig—you are the sea ! It's not your blue eyes or any one thing about you, I mean, but you, all of you. Your name—everything. And here have I

been walking tired and hot for years past now, longing to dive into you. . . . But the sea slipped away from me somehow, as if a glass wall rose up between you and me. You didn't answer my letters. I felt as if I had no air to breathe when you didn't write. Oh, I can't understand now how I ever managed to paint a single stroke."

Hedvig threw her arms round him and pressed her head close to his breast.

" Oh, forgive me, forgive me, Johan. Do say you're happy now, and not angry with me any more."

" Oh, I can't say such words to you, Hedvig. But I love you more madly than ever now, with that look in your eyes. I have seen it once before to-day—when the little girl cried out for the dog that ran towards us in the car. You are all tenderness, Hedvig dear. Not a wooden doll, or a stuffed kiwi—no ! "

" Really, I think I can agree with you as to the last," said Hedvig. " I don't feel in the least like a stuffed cassowary or whatever it was you said."

Oh, Hedvig and Johan had many things to tell each other to-day. They grew quite merry, and walked on, cutting across all roads without any idea as to where they would end.

" I'll tell you," said Johan, " how it was I managed to hold out in spite of being in love with you and never getting a word from you in return. I wrote to Fru van Haag, and she consoled me. She simply said, ' Don't worry about her ; she shall be yours all right as soon as you've made your name as an artist.' And I didn't see how I could believe in it really, but I stuck to the work, all the same. I made as if I did believe it, and then I went to Paris and Rome and all those places, and starved and painted and—well, she was right, you see ! "

" Oh—Johan . . ." Hedvig clasped his arm suddenly. " Did you order dinner at the hotel ? "

" Yes. Roast lamb and—oh, I can't remember what I said. I was half out of my senses already at the time. It was the chauffeur, really, who decided."

" Well, we must get Fru van Haag to come too ! "

" Yes," agreed Johan, and there were extra kisses because it was a fine idea.

" But how are we to get hold of her ? "

" Oh, that's easy enough."

" How ? "

" He'll manage it all right—the chauffeur, I mean. I sent him back to town to find her. Hedvig, I wonder if you'll ever understand what I felt like at that moment, standing there making jokes with that leather-bound fellow in the car. I must get hold of Fru van Haag, I said to myself. Either she'll have to help me over the black depths of misery—in a word, take Hedvig Egholm back home with her while I go out in a boat . . . after all, a man's only one life, you know, and that's not much use to him if he can't live it with the woman he loves. Or else she'll be badly wanted to—to celebrate the festive occasion. But you needn't suppose I dared go far along *that* line of thought ! "

After another hour of delight, Hedvig and Johan came down to the hotel. The chauffeur was waiting for them, and reported that he had found Fru van Haag, not at the exhibition, but at her hotel. And she had sent this card.

" Did you speak to her yourself ? " asked Hedvig.

" Yes."

" Oh, thank Heaven for that ! I felt so nervous all at once. I wonder why she wouldn't come."

Johan opened the envelope hastily, and read :

" DEAR JOHAN FORS,—I can't come. There was an important letter waiting for me here when I got back, and I must go off to-night to Knarreby again. Come, both of you, if you can. CLARA VAN H."

He passed the card to Hedvig.

The dinner was countermanded. The car was brought round, and a moment later they were driving back to Copenhagen at full speed.

Neither Johan nor Hedvig spoke ; both were wondering what strange thing could have happened now. It must certainly be something very serious indeed to make Fru Clara return to Knarreby and Hr. van Haag.

" Could it be anything to do with us—my people—father, I mean ? " said Hedvig, after a while.

" I shouldn't be surprised if you were right."

" You know, then, that Fru van Haag has been just as much to father and mother as she has to us two ? "

" Yes, I could see that from her letters. That is to say—you know her upside-down way of looking at things—she was always writing about how grateful she was to you and your mother and father for all you'd been to her. And I believe her. Only think what your father, for instance, has been to me. I used to meet him at nights when I was out with my violin. If it hadn't been for him, I shouldn't be the man I am now. I have seen him kneeling down, offering up sacrifices of stones and pouring out wine on the ground. I have never spoken to him, but I feel I owe him a great deal, nevertheless, for he helped to bring something of poetry, mysticism, into my life."

Johan shook his head as if dwelling on some memory of the past, and said :

" And for an artist, that's as needful as water for a fish."

" Poetry, yes, but mysticism . . ." said Hedvig thoughtfully.

" Poetry and mysticism are like oxygen and hydrogen, the two together make the water."

" Do you really mean it—do you, I wonder ? " said Hedvig. And she repeated the words again as if to herself.

They had reached the town now, and were twisting and turning in and out between clanging trams and tinkling cycles until they stopped in front of the tubbed trees and spread awnings of the hotel.

Johan and Hedvig went up in the lift and knocked at Fru van Haag's door.

" Come in ! " came from within. And they entered.

Fru Clara stood by the window, bending over a trunk. She looked up with a smile, but her eyes were reddened with weeping.

Hedvig's eyes were drawn at once to a little gilt table where lay a letter with her mother's three dabs of sealing-wax and the impress of a thimble. A sudden fear seized her ; it must be something . . . her father . . ."

Johan kissed Fru Clara's hand, and said :

" Your prophecy's fulfilled, Fru van Haag. Hedvig is *my* Hedvig now. As a matter of fact, she always has been. But she wouldn't own up till to-day."

Fru van Haag drew them to her in turn, kissed each on the brow, and uttered brokenly a few gay words about youth and happiness.

" And I did so hope it would come. I never doubted you, Johan, but I was a little anxious about her. And now, you two dear creatures, come and hear what's

happened in Knarreby. The bricks have turned out a failure! Every single one of them a dead lump of refuse. And your father had set all his hopes on this one thing, and the shock was more than he could bear. He's lying there at home now, very ill — perhaps dying."

With tears of suffering in her eyes Fru Clara told them what the letter said. Her own sensitive heart had heard Egholm's despairing groans and Anna's quiet grief.

"I must go home to them now. I must go by the night train—it's the only thing to do," she said.

"I could go, Fru van Haag," said Hedvig.

"You? No, dear, I must go myself."

"Oh, won't you let me?"

"We can go together—all three of us, perhaps. But I must go in any case. You've your way of looking at your father, and I've mine. And the great thing now is to make him happy at the last."

"I've come to look at father differently now," said Hedvig softly.

"Since when?"

Hedvig bowed her head.

"To-day," she said.

Fru van Haag saw now that Hedvig could accomplish as much as she herself—or perhaps more. She realised too that it would raise a whirl of scandal if she were to return to Knarreby without going to the Toldbod. There was no saying what Hr. van Haag might not find it necessary to do—*for the look of the thing.* It was with twofold relief, therefore, that she learned of the change in Hedvig's view.

They stayed together, all three, till the train went. The two women quarrelled mildly about Johan. Fru

van Haag wanted him to go to Knarreby with Hedvig, but Hedvig herself insisted that he should stay with Fru van Haag for the few days that remained until she left for the south. And Hedvig gained the day.

The train roared out from the glass-roofed hall, leaving Johan and Fru van Haag on the platform. Among the scores of waving handkerchiefs their eyes followed one. The metals creaked long after the train had gone ; the space between the platforms yawned like an open grave.

The crowd had begun to disperse ; Johan and Fru Clara tore themselves away and followed, walking slowly out towards Vesterbro.

Then Johan bent his viking neck, speaking close to her ear in the noise of the traffic, and said :

" We shall meet next year in Rome, Fru van Haag. And be happy together there ? Shall we ? "

Fru van Haag looked into his eyes with a glance at once firm and deep.

" No," she said. " No, Johan Fors. Do not speak to me of meeting in Rome. I have had a great sorrow to-day—but a far greater joy. And I will take both in my hands and go up into the solitude of the mountains."

The street was thronged with a noisy crowd ; Johan and Fru van Haag were elbowed and jostled from this side and that, but Fru Clara seemed already as if moving in her solitude among the mountains. Johan heard every quiver of her wonderful voice ; her words seemed to take form like rich dark grapes.

" I will go away and hide among the hills, where no one can find me any more. Perhaps I may be able to look up and follow you and Hedvig from afar—but you

must not try to seek me out. I only hope the story of Fru van Haag is ended happily to-day."

It was Fruen—Fruen of the gentle heart that spoke. Johan walked with knit brows and said no word. He felt he had no right to speak.

XX

THE following night Hedvig sits in Egholm's little parlour, talking with her father. He is fully dressed—has been for the past three days and nights, despite all Anna's prayers and entreaties. The faint light of the oil-lamp reaches only to his chest, but his haggard face seems twice as large as usual in the half-dark above. He is in pain, without a moment's respite. As he speaks, he writhes about, twisting his body into different wry positions every minute. But his voice is quite low and under control ; save for the look of him, one might believe he was sitting over some work that must be finished before the morning, having a comfortable chat with his daughter as the night draws on.

Yet he is speaking of death.

" I'm not afraid, you know. No more than the other times I've changed my trade. Only a little anxious. I turned photographer because I was no good on the railway ; now I'm going to be a dead man because I'm no good as a live one."

" You're going to get well, father, and do big things yet. Make a great invention, or take up your old turbine again. You see—you wait and see ; it will be all right."

" Think a cracked heart can grow together again ? Mine's cracked, as I said. I have to sit holding it all the time, and as soon as I even think the least bit

hard, the blood comes boiling out all loose into my chest."

"But you know well enough it's not that really, father. It feels like that, perhaps, but if it was true, you'd be dead long ago."

But Egholm stuck to his own idea, and went on :

"Now, the question is whether I shall be any good dead. If not, what then ? I was no good as a merchant, so I turned photographer, and being no more good at that than the other, I turned railway man—the thing I was least good at of all. And what then ? Photographer again. But can I get alive again if I find I only make a hash of being dead ? I'm tired now, you know—dreadfully tired. . . ."

"Haven't you anything you believe in now, father ? Once, I remember, you used to be stronger in your belief than anyone I've ever known."

Egholm twisted his body forward and expanded his chest.

"No. No. It's all gone to pieces somehow. With my faith as with my work. The Brethren over in Odense sickened me of all religion, till I turned atheist. But what sort of an atheist was I ? One that went out secretly into the woods to offer up sacrifices to God. I turned inventor, because I didn't somehow fit in among the things we've got already. But my inventions were no good, and I wished myself back in the olden times, when everything was primitive all round."

Fru Egholm entered from the bedroom, and slipped into a chair with a sigh. Egholm turned his head towards her, and said :

"And I've been a tyrant to your mother here, but a clumsy one ; I wasn't even clever at that. . . ."

Fru Egholm sprang up, took one of his hands in hers, and said, weeping :

" You ? Ah no, dear, no. You've been so good ! Don't sit there in a solemn hour lying that you're wicked when you're so good."

" Good ? I ? When ? " said Egholm.

" To-day and yesterday—always."

" No. Since Fru van Haag came, I've been ' good.' But I've only been good very badly, just as I was wicked very badly before she came."

Anna found this rather beyond her. She said :

" Remember : ' Judge not,' it says. And it's all the same for not judging yourself."

" The punishment must be what it may. I can't work it out any different."

Egholm laid his arms along the back of the settee, one on either side ; his head drooped weakly forward, and he went on faintly :

" No, it's just that I'm thinking about ; if I could look back and find one single thing I'd ever done that was complete and thorough, I could die in peace. But there's nothing."

Hedvig glanced back mentally over her father's life, as far as she knew it. There were many evil things she remembered. True, she could find excuses in his sickness of mind, in his poverty, but she knew that what he was thirsting for now was not forgiveness for sins committed, but acknowledgment, appreciation of some positive achievement. That alone can make a human being happy.

" It is a great deal to ask," she said. " How many can say they have done anything so great in their lives ? Father, don't sit there and make me unhappy too. Are you going to ask the same of me ? I'm only a girl, that

lives her life and looks after her work, and—how shall I say it ?—cares for some one else in the world and believes some one cares for her too. But, father, *is* there more than that ? For I've so little wish for anything more. A special task in life—is it that you mean ? Tell me what you think, for I know you're wiser than I."

Egholm raised his head and looked at the girl ; the furrows of pain showed lighter in his face.

" You ask me ? You do me the honour to ask what I think ? No, don't ! You mustn't. All that I do and all that I say is wrong. Don't listen to me. Listen to what your own heart tells you. *You* are wise—but as for me, I know nothing—nothing."

" Oh, father, you know you don't mean that. You've always reckoned me just as a silly, naughty girl."

Egholm smiled slightly.

" Naughty, yes—but it's just that naughtiness I mostly count as wisdom now. You've always set yourself up against me, from the time you were no bigger than a sparrow. How did you know that was the only proper thing to do ? I was your father—but who told you that I was a fool as well ? I've admired you in secret for years past ; and to-day it shall be made manifest, being the Last Day. You sprang at my throat once, when you were a little girl—once when I was going to ill-treat your mother. And since that time you've been my superior."

" But, father—if I'm as perfect as you say, then you *have* made something that's perfect, seeing I'm your daughter ! "

Egholm started, but answered swiftly :

" I wasn't thinking of bodily things."

" But body and spirit can't be separated like that, father. And I didn't go out into the world, away from

your influence, till I was nearly grown up. No, it's no good shaking your head and saying you've only been an example to me of what I should avoid. Do you know anything about pottery ? "

Egholm thought for a moment, but Hedvig, seeing the effort worried him, went on at once :

" I knew a man who made vases and figures and baked them in an oven. He was a great artist. And his vases were the loveliest colours. He knew the secret of a powder that nobody else knew. And it was *that* that made the lovely colouring."

" A sort of alchemy ? "

" Something like that, you might say. But your life is just like that powder, father. And I can say that my heart at least is a rare work of art, a vase in beautiful colours. For I don't think there's anyone in the world can feel so happy as I can. Oh, father, it *is* a lovely thing, my heart."

Egholm felt soothed beyond measure by her words. His face brightened to real gladness as he answered :

" Well, if I really am a magic powder, I don't mind being burnt up ! "

Emanuel came home by the night train, and, later still, Sivert came stealing in. He had gone back to his old habit of nocturnal wanderings. The whole family was now assembled, and Egholm chatted a little with each in turn. There was no pain at his heart now, but he assured them he was near to death. They propped him up with pillows, and tried to jest—he wasn't going to die this time. His conviction was unshaken, but now and then he dozed off for a few minutes where he sat, and at last dropped off into a peaceful sleep.

Fru Egholm beckoned the three children away. Who could tell—perhaps the sleep would do him good.

They decided to go up into the attic, where their voices would not disturb him. Sivert was to tell them all about the trouble at the brickworks.

"Yes," he said. "I knew it all beforehand. Cornelius had sworn to have his revenge."

"Cornelius Worm? For what?"

"He clambered up into father's turbine boat one day when he was a boy, and cut himself. And that's why he cheated father over the brickworks."

"I don't think it needs any special secret reason to make Cornelius Worm cheat anyone," said Hedvig.

"Ah, but he's been boasting of it to Sveidal, the engineer. And Sveidal's a friend of mine. *You* don't know the secrets of this world. But I think and think and find them all out, down in my cellar."

"But even if Cornelius did want to cheat for some reason or another, he couldn't make the burning turn out a failure."

Sivert answered at once.

"The clay was all used up beforehand; what was left was nothing but gravel, really. But where one swindler leaves off, another starts; they form an alliance all over the world. The foreman, he was a swindler too."

"But I thought he was so reasonable about wages," said Emanuel.

"Ah, you haven't seen his contract. Father, he had a contract too, in the end, like somebody else I could name. And that contract particularly said that the foreman, in addition to his wages, was to have *all imperfect or faulty bricks not ordinarily saleable as sound.* Do you see it now?"

Sivert waved his hands and giggled in thorough enjoyment of his own perspicacity.

"Now do you see why the foreman naturally managed

so as to have as many spoiled as possible ? All of them were spoiled—and so they're all his ! "

Hedvig and Emanuel looked at each other—they realised that perhaps Sivert was not talking nonsense altogether.

After a pause Sivert went on again :

" And now we come to our inheritance."

" Heavens, Sivert, are you thinking of that ? "

" Yes—and laughing between my tears at the thought."

" You'll be disappointed, Sivert, I'm afraid."

" I've chosen my thing. Nothing specially grand—I've all I want in that line in my own wealthy, semi-aristocratic home. Shall I show you what I've chosen ? "

Without waiting for an answer he ran out across the loft and down the stairs to the kitchen. A moment later he was back, holding in one hand a big brass ladle.

" Here—that's my portion ! "

" And do you really care about a thing like that ? "

" I'm going to give it to Minna Lund. She collects brass and copper things. And whenever there's visitors, she shows them round. We've visitors now nearly every evening, people of the highest society—horse-doctors, postmasters, and engineers. Sometimes she asks me in too. And then I can sit quiet in my corner, pretending to read in the telephone book, while they're all crowding round to admire my brass ladle."

" And quite a nice thing to do with it too," said Hedvig kindly. " Then you must polish it up nicely, you know, and straighten out that big dent."

Sivert crouched together and slapped his thighs. " What—the big dent ? Are you out of your senses altogether ? Why, that's where father hit me on the head with it, when I was only four. It's to stay there

as it is, and hang like a bright memorial over the greatest day in my life ! "

He held up the ladle to his head, and cried in delight :

" There, now, I swear . . . come and look—*it fits me still* ! "

Hedvig lapsed into deep thought. Down below lay an old man struggling with death—up here was *his victim* waiting for his inheritance. Well, well, if it was all a pottery experiment on the part of the Lord, it had not turned out altogether well. A vase or so here and there had spoiled in the burning.

She realised the gentleness of death ; for a little while she sat with her hands before her face, then, rising, she stroked Sivert's hair and cheek. Sivert let his arms fall limply to his sides ; his legs seemed weakening under him, and his lips quivered.

The three sat on a little while yet, talking of what had passed and what was to come.

As soon as Anna found herself alone with her husband, she fell to tending him with the gentle hands of a woman who has been a mother many times. In a little while she had slipped his boots off, and laid his feet up without waking him—he would never have allowed it otherwise. He was not altogether without strength. His sleep grew sounder, his hands, that had been clenched all the time, opened now and fumbled gently at the rug she had drawn over him.

Still as a shadow she sat, watching him. At the least change in his breathing she sat up, ready to help—if only she knew how ? But Egholm slept and slept. Anna knelt down by the settee and unbuttoned his waistcoat.

And here she might stay now she was here. She

was as near to him now as she could be, and by laying the patchwork rug double, she could lie easily, resting her forehead against the cushioned edge of the settee. Anna had not slept now for two nights past.

All might turn out well yet—hear how he slept now, her poor lad. Ah, dear Lord, it was no high treason now to call him her poor lad, now he lay there all weak and helpless. And she meant no harm by it indeed, dear Lord, never a thought of harm. . . .

She ventured the same thought once more. Her head rested so softly as she was now. The blood was beating, beating through her veins; she felt just as if she were sitting by a cradle. Rockabye, rockabye—sleep, sleep, sleep. And now, here was big sister Hedvig come home . . . rockabye, rockabye, sleep—Hedvig, with good things for you and me—rockabye, rockabye—and sleep. . . .

And at last Anna herself was sleeping—kneeling, bowed, as if in prayer before the great Buddha with the shaven head.

An hour perhaps went by. Then suddenly she is torn from her sleep by some one calling her name.

"Anna! Anna!"

She rubs her eyes, rubbing her spectacles off, draws her stiff legs up under her, and springs to her feet.

"Oh, heavens—is it you, Egholm, my dear! I must have been dreaming. Is it worse, dear? Did you call?"

Her brain is in a whirl, but every nerve tells her something terrible is happening.

She fumbles for her glasses, strikes her forehead against the chair she cannot see, and grows yet more confused. At last she found what she sought.

"Oh, heavens—speak to me, Egholm, my dear!"

"*It's come,*" said Egholm in a hollow, dreadful voice.

"Does it hurt you, dear?"

"Hurts—yes."

He had wormed himself right up to one arm of the settee, and was sitting straight up, with one hand in under his shirt. There was a greenish shimmer in his eyes.

"Where—where does it hurt?" asked Anna, shaking all over.

"Here," he said, pointing under his ribs. "I'm all icy cold from here downwards. It'll reach my heart in a minute."

Anna stood swaying this way and that from the hips, and digging her fingers into her grey hair. This wretched old head of hers—could it not find something to help somehow? Was he to die and she to live? Impossible; how could a man's little finger live when the man was killed?

"What—what shall I do?" she moans.

"Nothing to be done. Fire's going out."

"Hot-water bandages!"

Egholm felt that here was an idea which might really be some use. He said:

"It might help, perhaps, for a bit. But it'll have to be quick—quick!"

Anna dashed out into the kitchen and put a kettle on the oil-stove.

"Quick, quick!" cried Egholm wildly.

She tore forth all manner of woollen things and tried to wrap round him, but he was unreasonable, and thrust her away, muttering words she did not understand.

"What's the good of insulating when the fire's out. No, heat's the thing. Fire—fire."

Anna feels at the water—it is bitingly cold.

"Light the fire—and let the powder burn! Can't you hear? Light the fire—the fire!"

Anna's thoughts are flying all ways at once. Where is there warmth to be got this icy, deathly night? And then a great white thought comes fluttering home to her. *Now she knows!* She tears open her bodice and the pitiful linen beneath, and presses her beating heart against his chest, lays herself close against his body, with but one wish, that the fire in her heart might serve *him*, might burn for him, and keep the ice from freezing his heart to a standstill.

She lay there so, long after the last sigh had quivered through him. For it may have been the lot of some to lay their heart close to another's and pour warm blood into it, but that is a great happiness. And the *great* happiness was not to be her lot.

So she lay, when the first rays of the sun shone through the curtains. The light came earlier now than before; for all the trees were felled, and Engineer Sveidal's levelling ran right up to the wall.

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